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THE LADY OF LIPARI

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THE LADY OF LIPARI

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THE LADY OF LIPARI

A POEM

In Three Cantos



HENRY S. KING & CO., LONDON

1875

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PREFACE.



HIS Poem is founded upon a tale of Boccaccio, being the second of the fifth day of the Decameron. Any reader acquainted with the original story will at once see that it has furnished no more than a foundation for the Poem, which adheres to its main outlines only, and departs even from these towards the end. This treatment, which so many of the works of the old master have met with, appears to me so specially applicable to this one, that I confess I am surprised at its having been

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so long untouched. It affords, I am convinced, an excellent idea for a work of art; and the fault is mine alone if that idea has been marred in the execution.

The hero's name has been changed from the original Martuccio, partly on account of the metre, and partly because an English reader unacquainted with Italian would, almost inevitably, mispronounce that word.

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THE LADY OF LIPARI.

CANTO I.

THERE lived in Lipari, long time ago,
An agèd man, of wealth and some renown,
Long years before, in other lands, and so
Once wont to seek the smile and fear the frown
Of fortune, till from her he turned aside
And took pale Prudence for his gainful guide.

In Florence born before the evil days,
He helped, in youth, to tame Arezzo's power
At Campaldino, where the meed of praise
He won, that turns to hate in faction's hour.
In after years he lent both tongue and sword
To help the Whites; and when the northern lord,

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Who came to save a shepherd from his sheep,[1]
Had drowned the pale offence in streams of gore,
'Twas Guido's lot both life and lands to keep,
Though doomed to wait upon a foreign shore
The turn of faction's tide, whose ebb and flow
Brought luck at last to those who, kneeling low,

Would take it red from hands imbued in blood
Of their own brothers, and in humble guise
Repent of wrongs received! That fortune's flood
To such unlooked-for height should ever rise!
So thought our Guido and his fellows when,
Their penance done, they homeward slunk! Wise men!

One madman did refuse that proffered grace,
And found no rest beneath the stars and sun
He loved so well, and made his dwelling-place![2]
But what of him? Our Guido now had won
His home again, and prudence and repute,
And passed for one most wary and astute

In all affairs of state. By steps not slow,
Yet not too swift, he gained the safer side,

[1] See note A. [2] Dante.

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Made head by brain and arm; and when the foe
Of Florence[1] to her gates unchecked did ride,
To find a garden and to leave a waste,
It fell to him to bear the news in haste

To royal Robert, great in learnèd lore.
Here Guido found his fate, and soon, the day
Of peril past, in peace he homeward bore
A maid, much mourned some hours within the gay
And gilded Court. Nor did the stranger dame
Belie amid new scenes her former fame.

She was a woman framed to speak the still,
Low voice of peace when comes the rushing storm;
To prop the weak, to bend the stubborn will;
To be amid the fight a figured form
Of smiling Hope, and, when the fight is done,
A soothing presence, be it lost or won!

But she died soon; and Guido, left alone
With one young child, hid close within his heart
His grief; yet some would say there came a moan
From out his widowed chamber. With a start

[1] See note B.

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He would return a greeting on the way,
Though little wont to dream by light of day.

And yet he played his part among the chief
Of those who swayed the state, and by the crowd
Was deemed a saint, or that which our belief
Doth hold least saintly, as was low or loud
The cry for change, that with inconstant breath
Bids freedom live, or speaks her doom of death.

Disaster came, disorder, then distress,
And in the distance loomed the baleful star
Of tyrant power.[1] A wary man might guess
The coming ills, and who could see from far
The rising tempest and the threatened wreck
(So thought our friend) were mad to keep the deck.

Perchance he wearied, too, to find the game,
As played by him, but little worth, and now
Was placed too high to hope the fickle dame,
If adverse, soon again would smooth her brow
To kindly welcome; so resolved to be
Once more an exile while the way was free!

[1] See Note C.

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Some time he roamed about among the lands
Where love had crowned his life while yet the spring
Of hope flowed freely; but who lonely stands
Where once he stood unlonely, like the string
That hangs unbroken in a riven lyre,
Has turned old music into creaking wire!

He sailed for Sicily, and by the wind
The ship was turned from out her course, and days
Of peril passed, in which no eye might find
A trace of land. At length the parting haze
Left bare and black the rocks that gird the shore
Of Lipari; and much it tasked the lore

Of well-proved seamen in a sudden creek
That cuts the rock to moor their weary bark.
Here Guido lands, and not in vain doth seek
For kindly shelter. Here he thinks to mark
A quiet little-known, yet not without
Life's finer needs; for dwelling round about

Are men of his degree, enough to keep
Good fellowship alive, if not to fill

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His home with changing crowds from sleep to sleep,
Who wait no bidding but their own sweet will.
Some, too, he hoped to bring, and now to find
In that far land a dwelling to his mind!

He found a house that, while its former lord
Yet lived, had known a long, unclouded day
Of social sunshine. Now were bower and board
The undisturbed domain of dank decay,
For he who owned the place did love it so
As felons love their fetters. From a low

And rock-bound coast we take our winding way,
Beside a stream that haunts the woodland glen
With muffled music. Here the darts of day
Do pierce the leafy shade, but now and then
That forest trees against the summer sheen
Weave cool and close to save spring's early green.

We pass from out the gloom, and find, amid
The circling wood, a slope of garden ground;
A dwelling crowns the scene far off, and hid
In part by trees that meet to form the bound

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Of this fair spot above; to left and right
They climb, in double line, the landward height.

And here and there a straggling giant spreads
His gnarlèd arms to form a summer bower;
From out a little lake a fountain sheds
Upon the thirsty banks a freshening shower;
For here the stream is stayed for more delight
By trusty tending; still the place is bright

With flowers of every hue. What need to tell
Too long a tale? Enough, the ancient hall
And smiling garden pleased our friend so well;
They soon were his, and soon again was all
As it had been before the gloomy time.
Some comrades followed to that southern clime,

From Florence driven by her faithless friend;
And some he learnt to know within the isle,
Where soon his name was heard from end to end
As one of open hand and ready smile,
Who loved good fellowship, and lacked not gold.
So on the years in pomp and pleasure rolled.

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One child, I said, he had, and she was young,
Nor could remember aught of former days;
For her each joy and grief and longing clung
To this her island home. How fondly plays
The light of memory on scenes that broke
Our spirit's sleep when we to life awoke!

Each ancient tree, each rock whose rugged face
Frowned out above the green, was like a friend!
Who well as she could find the lurking-place
Of each uncultured flower from end to end
Of that wild wood, that gathered like a veil
Upon the hill above, and made the dale

A shady spot to escape the noontide heat?
What joy to scale alone the rocks that brave
The bursting breakers, or with nimble feet
Rush on to meet, then shun the coming wave,
And laugh the while to feel the wrathful shower
Of spray, and mock the monster's baffled power!

The life was wild and beautiful and free,
A world within a world! and all her own

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Was this domain of earth and sky and sea,
And wood and winding water, where alone
She wandered or took rest. Come now what may,
No clouds can dim that rosy dawn of day!

So passed the years away, and more and more
Did Guido love the child whose laughing eyes
Had power to pierce his spirit's inmost core,
As others once, and bid a tear arise
That burnt unshed within his own. To hide
This mood he oft would send her from his side,

Then call her back to hear some pleasant tale
From out his former life, in tones that weak
Might seem at first, but as her face did hail
With steadfast eye, knit brow, and glowing cheek,
Each word of his, they gathered strength, and he
Was keen to tell as she to hear could be.

And so she grew to womanhood, and still
They two were chosen comrades, else alone;
For others deemed a wild and wayward will
Was with the maid; and if who best had known

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Had learnt to love her best, yet these would say
Her moods were fickle as an April day.

And he amid his comrades dwelt apart
In friendly fellowship. The men who most
Were with him recked but little of the heart,
So but the hall were open, and the host
Were kindly. All he welcomed; none he made
His bosom friend save her, who like the shade

In summer was to him when worn or sad.
So this one child became a part of all
His listless life, and what he garnered had
Of graver lore to her at times would fall.
So, little taught from books, where seldom roam
The thoughts of maidens, hers had found a home.

So had she lived, a very child at heart,
Yet one who wore at times a brooding brow,
That cleared again as morning mists depart
Before the bursting beam. I know not how
To paint her face, that light or shadow caught
From each new scene and every passing thought.

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A slender form, but lithe in every limb;
A sun-kissed brow beneath a night of hair;
An eye where light in darkness seemed to swim;
The mouth of mildness truest women wear—
These had you marked, although the face were small,
Nor formed in strictest mould. The life was all!

And now there came a change, and by degrees—
Like some shy bird that long will keep the bough,
Then flutter low above the spoil he sees,
Then light, and eat with fearful joy, that now
And then looks round as if a lurking foe
Had spread the feast—this island maiden so,

By such degrees, drew near and played a part
In that gay throng her sire had gathered round
His courtly presence; but the wayward heart
Beat still within her bosom. When the sound
Of mirth was still, and guests who called her shy
Cold carriage pride, took leave, with drooping eye

And quicker-beating heart she saw them go;
Then, like a child from school, in haste would run

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To some old haunt of hers, or kneeling low
Beside her father's chair, in tones that won
His ready smile, would prattle on; or still,
In social silence, sit and wait his will.

And yet Gostanza (else no woman) soon
Did love the homage paid with lavish hand
By men; the more, perchance, because the boon
Of smile or speech from her few might command.
The women mostly marvelled she could move
So many hearts, and bore her little love.

Her early shrinking from the louder life
Grew less with use; yet often far away
Her thoughts would roam, nor heed the playful strife
Of tongues around; and some fair dames would say
She seemed possessed or mad!—would smile at naught,
Nay blush, and murmur words no ear had caught!

Among the guests who graced the social board
Of Guido was a youth of ancient name,
But little wealth, or none beside the sword
He well had wielded in the grisly game

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Of war for Naples in her darkest hour.
He fled to 'scape the northern spoiler's power

To Lipari, and here a welcome guest
Became, and found by many hearths a home;
For light of heart was he, and made a jest
Of fortune's frown. Though forced afar to roam
In other lands while yet his month was May,
Martino let no sorrow dim the day

Of his first youth. No heart as his was light,
No mirth like his had power to smooth awhile
The brows on which doth brood the starless night
Of constant care, or soften to a smile
Those lines that make the livid lips so grim.
What then of those whose life's cup still did brim?

He led the dance, and when to rest the throng
Of dancers gathered under some old tree,
None touched like him the lute, or with the song
Charmed ear and heart, or with such wit and glee
Could tell the tales with which they wiled away
The noontide heat on many a summer day.

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Who wonders, then, if he to Guido's heart
Was dear, and if he made him more and more
Of that gay court where he did reign a part?
Soon seldom passed the youth another door,
And was a merry chief, whose pleasant power
Was owned by all in every idle hour.

Gostanza seemed at first to stand apart,
Nor own his sway, nor hear his song and jest;
And not a little did it grieve the heart
Of one who, ever wont to lead the best
And fairest captive, thought it shame to seek,
In vain, a kindly word, a changing cheek.

And more and more he spent the best he had
On her alone, nor thought of those who gave
The praise he sought with lavish tongue. So mad
The heart of man can be when once the slave
Of tyrant love, who now in stranger guise
A captive led the knight too wary wise,

In his conceits, to dread a fiercer flame
Than that he lit each wanton week anew.

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For all his art the maid was yet the same!
And while her look was cold, her words were few,
She came to sway his heart that long had been
A faithless realm, and owned no lawful queen.

The pain was long. At last a change did come
That brought some hope. At times she showed a wild,
Unlooked-for passion; fain would fly to some
Old haunt apart from others, like a child
That something ails, it knows not what, nor how
To win relief, untaught its neck to bow

Beneath the yoke. At others she would seem
To listen passively, as if her mind
Did heed his words but little. Yet a gleam
Of light was life made new to him, could find
A way from out the gloom that on her hung,
Like a stray sunbeam heavy clouds among!

Upon a day, in summer's sultry prime,
A band had sought, beneath the dappled shade
Of spreading beechen boughs, a cooler clime,
And here and there at listless ease were laid

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Upon the unbrowned grass, or propped upright
Against the rugged giant's moss-grown might.

And jests were heard, and laughing lifted eyes
Met eyes that sunk to smile upon the ground,
Where turned the smiler's hand, in girlish guise,
The bending blades her rosy fingers round;
And here and there a graver word that brought
A low reply, or none the ear had caught.

Gostanza was of those who scorned the low
Green couch, and sat above with eyes that smiled
Upon the scene they saw not, nor did know;
And near, not next to her, where most was mild
The broken beam, Martino lay; and now
He looked on her, now bent his moody brow:

Till one bright dame, in tones of high command,
All hearers hushed to silence; then to him
Did turn, and bade, as oft he swore to stand
At ladies' beck, so now a lady's whim
To humour with a tale. One look to see
Another said not nay, and thus spoke he:—

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'I heard a tale, long years ago, so sweet,
So sad, yet blithe, that as some softest strain
That once drew tear or smile in camp or street
In silence soothes the spirit's ear again,
So, oft to me it comes across the seas
From sunny Sicily, a fragrant breeze.'

And then he told the tale of Lisa's love,
And how she saw the King ride in below
The window, whence, as looks a brooding dove
From out her native cot, she dared to throw,
Yet dared in awe, a glance upon the face
Of him in whom they said each knightly grace

Did dwell in perfect form, of him who came
To save her native isle from ruthless bands;
How in her heart awoke the tender flame
That burned her life away; and loving hands
Would smooth her pillow, loving voices say
Dear words of hope in vain. She drooped away,

As doth a tender plant that lacks the sun.
And here he sees Gostanza's melting eye

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Turned full upon him, as it would have won
The tardy words from out his lips—'To die,
She seemed like!' And now the lurking tear
Bursts forth. She bends as one who fain would hear

New tidings of a friend, in danger long
From fell disease; and he to her alone
Speaks on, nor sees aught else, nor heeds the throng
That hears in silence (save an under tone
From some fair dames, who talk of that doth seem
More near their laughing eyes than this fond dream!)

He tells how to her side the singer brought
His lyre, to charm her back to life again;
And how for her his songs of love were naught.
And when he ceased the dear though deadly strain,
She told him all, and he made haste to give
Such comfort as he might, and bade her live.

Gostanza bends her head the while to hide
Her moistened cheek; and now the teller's voice
Grows tender as he saith how he, the pride
Of minstrelsy and song, made heedful choice

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Of him among the bards who best could weave
Such longing into rhyme, then went at eve

To where at board did sit the goodly King,
Who quickly bade him chase all care away
From out his hall with sweetly-sounding string
And soothing song. And now that simple lay
Of pleading passion sings Martino low
And softly to his lute ; and while the flow

Of sweetest words on sweetest notes is borne
To her, she rises, like a thing in pain
That finds no place of rest, nor heeds the scorn
That plays about fair lips. Some words of vain
Excuse she murmurs, then is gone ! nor knows
Where she may fly to 'scape her weight of woes.

He, starting to his feet, his cherished lute
Cast down as little worth, is called again
To where he stands by laughter loud, and mute
And meaning looks, and jests that fall like rain.
They bid him make an end, and, with a sigh,
He speaks again, but now from out his eye

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All light has past. He brings the lovely tale
To its most lovely end, as if the thing
Were one that touched him not; and few could fail
To mark he told not all, and made the King
But scant of courtesy, and little like
The faultless knight whose look had power to strike

The heart of Lisa. Now they praise the tale,
But mingle praise with jests he fain would shun.
And now one saith, 'In needful care we fail
Of our host's daughter, left alone to run
Through woods like these! With her it seemed not well!'
They rise to seek her. She toward the dell

Had turned her steps, where in the thick-grown glade
Of unshorn grass, beneath the tender light
That winnowed softly through the leafy shade,
The little stream made way, and now from sight
Was hid by brake or branch, and now again
Burst out, and bubbled on toward the main.

And here she sought a place, to her well known,
Where full in view the truant waters pass

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Between two sloping banks, with flowers bestrown,
That bend to see within the gliding glass
Their mirrored form, as clear in shape and hue
As those above, yet softened to the view.

It was a peaceful spot, and yet the brook
Did give it such a life as else had been
To seek amid the calm. With one quick look
Around, that seemed of fear, as though the green
Might hide a lurking foe, the maiden came
To lay upon the grass her slender frame.

And tears flowed softly, yet they soon were dry!
One hand was spread against the limpid stream
That whispered softly as it rippled by—
A voice that mingled with her spirit's dream,
And soothed, yet bore it on to realms unknown;
For rest it might not find, least rest alone!

Each little flower had donned a brighter hue!
The birds had never sung so sweet a strain!
Nor been so deep above the twig-torn blue;
Nor from the moving mirror looked again

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Her face so kindly back, to meet the gaze
That asked if true could be long-slighted praise!

And while with fresh life heart and pulse did bound,
  While all within and all without was new,
There came from far above a softened sound
  Of laughing voices. Still they louder grew;
And she who hoped to shun the seeker's sight
In that still nook, nor need to think of flight,

Arose as doth a deer that hears the horn
  And hounds draw near his bed at break of day!
And fled through thickest brakes, nor stayed for torn
  Or soiled attire, but made her headlong way
To where a rocky rampart fronts the sea
Around the little land of Lipari.

None knew as she that small expanse of shore,
  No foot as hers was fast upon the rock;
And soon she reached a cave, from out the core
  Of one stone bastion scooped that felt the shock
Of ceaseless waves, but just below the rim
Of rock that made the caverns under brim.

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There, fearing no pursuit, she lay concealed,
And watched the breakers burst in foam below.
And now upon the shore loud laughter pealed,
Full many roundly swore she could not, so
She were no ocean nymph, have ta'en this way,
For every inch of land explored had they!

So dropped away the hunters one by one
(Or two by two, perchance), to seek their game
Within the upper wood, and here was done
The hateful chase; and forth Gostanza came
To seek the surge where it doth loudest rave,
And feel a heart-throb in each bursting wave!

She glides along the shore, now bathed in light
Of noonday beams that never fiercer fell;
Then starts, as smitten by the sudden sight
Of some unlooked-for thing. Above the swell
Of waters, on a rock that juts to meet
Their rude assault, one takes his lonely seat.

She knows him well, and half has turned to fly.
Too late! He comes! And now I may not speak

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The rest! One look, and through the other's eye
Each sees the soul within, and cheek to cheek,
And breast to breast, has met the clinging clay,
To find from heart to heart a nearer way!

And now 'twas time for words! And with a hand
Plunged deep in floods of hair, an arm that lay
About her slender form, an eye that scanned
His image in her own, he thus did say:—
'Until I saw thee first I never knew
The life of life!' (And here he nearer drew

The loved one to his heart.) 'I oft had thought
I loved in other days, and loved indeed
A face, a smile, that well I think had caught
Its sweetness from thine own—had come to lead
My heart to thee, in whom I find the whole
I loved in part about a living soul!

'Thou art my very love, all else a dream!
O say that I am thine! I fain would hear
The thing I know from out thy lips, and deem
It truer for the hearing!' Low and clear

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The answer came, and yet her beating heart
Did throb therein, 'In very deed thou art!

'Alas! I cannot speak the things I feel.
The sun I think thou art that makest day
Within my breast. Ah! could my tongue but steal
The speech of thine, to tell how far away
The time doth seem in which I knew not thee!
I ask my heart what joy therein could be!

'Forgive the fear that hid my heart awhile,
And read it now thyself, for vain are all
My words to speak it out!' And with a smile
Two big tears could not dim was hid the small
Bright face a moment—as doth seek its nest
A callow bird in fear—upon his breast.

And now 'tis raised again to make reply
To tender words, and meet the eye and lip
That bend to hers; and nought in earth or sky
Each sees beside the other. So may slip
The time away until the sinking sun
Has kissed the western wave, and day is done,

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Should they remain alone; but sore I fear
It cannot be; for now from out the bound
That shapes the wood behold a form appear,
And take his way across the rugged ground
Towards the self-same spot where stand the two!
'Twas Guido, who of old his daughter knew,

And thought himself to find where others might
Have searched in vain. He came, he looked, he saw
The lovers stand, nor well believed his sight;
And as a drowning man will clutch a straw,
He looked and looked again, and still they stood
Unknowing in the sunshine. Flesh and blood

Might not endure the sight. A bitter cry
Of rage did leave his lips, and broke the dream
That held the pair. Gostanza turned an eye
Of sudden fear to him, who then did seem
But little like her sire of old. She broke
Away, and fled in fear before he spoke.

He spoke, indeed, when passed the dumb dismay
That locked his lips, in tones of muffled hate.

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'Fair thanks, good sir, that thus you think to pay
Your debt to me! Yet were it well to wait
Some better place and time, when none were near
To break upon your joys, as I do fear

'I may have done! Yet something to a sire
May be forgiven if he fain would know
Where roams his child, and finds——' and here with ire
His voice did break, his brow and cheek did glow.
'Sir,' said the other, 'hear me first. Long time
I loved——' 'Ay, loved—a love, in sooth, sublime.

'You loved these lands, this home of wealth and ease.
I praise the prudence that did hope to make
So fair a prize; in sooth, it well might please
A lackland! This the prize, and what the stake?
Why, honour only—honour in the breast!'
'I pray you, sir——' 'Nay; fewest words are best.

'I loved you once! For this your head may shun
My vengeance yet! Then straight begone from me
And mine for ever! Peace! remain but one
Brief moment here, and you shall not be free

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To go alone! The path along the shore
Is open! Go, I say!' The look he wore

Said more than this. Martino strove to speak,
And wakened words so foul, for very rage
He gnawed his lip, nor stayed to hear. A streak
Of rocks, that with the billows ever wage
Long war, about the isle lay open, where
He wandered on, a prey to brooding care—

On, on along the shore, where olive trees
Come down to meet the breakers' whitening foam,
Their leafy gloom lit up by that sea-breeze
Which ever and anon doth through them roam
With gentle sound, and scatter gleams of white
Among their tops, like moonbeams through the night.

These on his left. Upon his right the sea,
In dance of gladness, on his moody brow
Doth dash its spray, as if it meant to free,
By jests, a friend from causeless gloom that now
Rests on him, unexplained the reason why
He wears a sullen look, a downcast eye.

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The sea-birds wildly scream, as if to rouse
Him from his dream of sadness. All in vain!
The burden under which his spirit bows
Gives not a moment's ease. A mind in pain
Sees all things in the dim, distorting light
That faintly glimmers through its murky night.

So, walking on awhile, he reached a town
(You hardly would have given such a name
To that small group of houses which low down
Hard by the water lay). Unknown to fame,
Its very name long since has passed away,
Nor could you find the spot on which it lay.

We know but this; 'twas built upon the shore,
Beneath the hills, whereon the richer sort
Had set their dwellings, and at first no more
Had been than a few fishers' huts; a port
Had then become for what small merchandise
The islanders might deal in. Yet nowise

Like merchant ships were all the barks that came
Within its narrow harbour from the storm

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To find a refuge; nor were all the same
In strength of crew or speed. The rounded form
That marks the trader here might meet your eye,
So might another. Ask you what or why?

Read on and learn! Our hapless friend, I said,
Had reached the town. He flung him on a rock,
That jutting seaward here had formed the bed
Of friendly shelter, where from every shock
Of wind and wave a ship might lie at ease,
And mock the madness of the outer seas.

It bent about, and left but little space
Between its utmost point and that dark shore
Of rock and ocean weed which girt the place
Of quiet waters on the side that more
To westward lay. 'Twas crowned with forest green,
Which formed from slanting beams a leafy screen.

Here craft of smaller size, close in to land,
Might lie moored to some rock, while on the deck
Reclined, or wandered on the neighbouring strand,
The careless crew, forgotten death or wreck

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They might but late have shunned, or now to meet,
Be on their way, in that repose so sweet

To children of the South. Now on this day
(The sun was sinking toward the western brine),
Upon that further side, a vessel lay
In just the peaceful manner which, a line
Or two above, I strove to bring before
Your eye, good friend. Not like the barks that bore

Cargo and merchandise was this, but long,
As built for swiftness, and with twice as great
A crew,—to judge at least by those who throng
In motley groups the shore, as ships of freight
Are wont to carry. These are each and all
Well armed. Some careless into slumber fall

Upon the beach, while some along it range
As listlessly as they, or 'mid the trees
Above it; others, joyous at the change
To *terra firma*, that from prison frees
Their members, their wild hearts from stern control,
Are taking toward the town a careless stroll.

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Our friend, absorbed in thoughts that filled his brain,
Gave but such scant attention to his eyes'
Clear presentation as does to a strain
He cares not for, a listener who lies
And lets the sounds in vain for entrance beat
Upon the ear, nor reach the spirit's seat.

He saw, and saw not. While, from all about
Afar, he listless lay, a friendly hand
Was laid upon his shoulder, and a shout
Of loud and joyous greeting made him stand
Up from his dismal dream, unknowing what
To think, and turning did he dream or not?

'Thou here!' 'And thou! Methinks I well might say
Not here at all! In mind at least dost seem
Far off as well may be! And now I pray
Thee tell the hidden cause of this thy dream.
Martino thus! Why, when thou last didst dance,
Thy foot did slip! No, worse! By evil chance

An eye thou long hadst deemed to thee alone
Was bright did kindly on another fall!

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Is this the evil thou dost now bemoan?
Or did the wine of thy last host, that all
The lying tongues of men were wont to praise,
Not meet the hope thou thus hadst learnt to raise?

'Still moody! Why, I see this must be some
Far graver matter! Pardon me! And now
To that old inn we see I pray thee come!
There we shall find what will relax thy brow,
Or I am wrong! Come, come, and thou shalt tell
All thy misfortunes, I my fortunes! Well?

'Thou wilt not? Nay, I swear this is not like
The man I loved! A friend comes back to thee,
Long time unmet, and yet thou dost but strike
Thy brow and turn away! No more! With me
I say thou shalt come!' And with friendly force
He led his captive off. They took their course

To where about the bay's head, of the town
The foremost house, an ancient inn full long
Had stood. From it, athwart the bay, right down
The roving eye might range, where oft a throng

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Of barks did lie. Now one alone that floats,
In seeming huge, among the fisher-boats.

And here they take their seat. Soon cups and wine
Are brought at good Orlando's call (the friend
Of our friend thus was named); but of the vine
The choicest juice might not have helped to mend
Martino's mood, as all in mind distraught
He sat; and if by chance his ear had caught

A word his comrade spake, with sudden start
To seem intent he vainly strove; put on
An eager air; would words at random dart
In answer; at a jest a face would don
Of most sepulchral aspect; if more grave
The matter, he would laugh. His friend, who gave

Good heed to all he saw, like one to whom
Such dire effects were nothing new, now broke
The silence young Martino's steady gloom
Had laid on both some moments. Thus he spoke:
'By all these random words, that stricken face,
I swear there is a woman in the case!

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'Nay, never blush, or think thou canst conceal
The thing from me! Dost think I have not known
The ills that weigh on thee? Come, now, reveal
The matter! They may bear their griefs alone
Who have no friends! For me, I claim the right
Of sharing thine. It nothing boots to fight

'Against my will, as thou mightst long ago
Have learnt.' Martino yielded after brief
Denial. Soon his friend the whole did know
Of what we here have told, and wherefore grief
Had pierced his heart. In silence they remained
Long time when he had ceased, for each refrained

From prating idly, nor had ought to say
That might be helpful in the matter. Then
Thus did Orlando speak: 'I see one way
Of help. 'Tis rough and perilous, but men
Think not of danger at such times. First hear
My tale! What I do judge will then be clear.

'I once did think to love; did think to be
Beloved again! A folly—nothing more!

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And yet, and yet,—I pray thee pardon me!
Old wounds will smart at times! Unlearnt the lore
Of life, I thought within a woman's breast
To find true love! Thou laugh'st not at the jest?

'It was a face, I trow, a man doth see
But once with eyes! Ah, well, I see it now.
Enough! enough! I say I thought to be
Beloved. A tearful eye, a downcast brow,
My pledges were when I did leave my home,
And hers, upon the sea, as now to roam.

'For I was poor, and she was nobly born;
And well I knew that he who craved her hand
With nought in his would win but scoff and scorn.
We pledged our vows, and I did leave the land
In one of those light barks that go to wreak
Just vengeance on the pirate Moors, and seek

'Both gold and glory in the chase. To free
The Christian waters from this scourge of hell
Is righteous, say the priests, and worthy we
Of that we chance to win; and I may tell

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This in thine ear, that not a little spoil
Is wont to crown our days of blood and toil!

'What need to weary thee? We fought and won
In four long cruises (not, I trow, without
Some losses and much distress). Our labours done,
We ever to Palermo went (no doubt
'Tis known to thee). Well, back we thither came
Once more, a year ago. And now my name

'(I would not boast, but this must tell) had been
Not all without renown in frequent fray.
Our chief, who many toilsome days had seen,
Wished now to live at ease, and oft would say
I was most worthy to succeed him. All
Assent to this; and me to lead them call!

'And soon my wealth was won; and now I made
My joyful way to Naples, where she dwelt
For whom I won it.' Here his words were stayed,
Then quicker came again: 'Who hath not felt
The like may laugh. My former love was wed.
I pray thee ask no more!' And here his head

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Did rest some silent moments on his hand,—
Then with a start, 'This folly now is o'er!
Enough. I left again my native land
And found my trusty bark. From shore to shore
I since have roamed to seek my former prey.
Hear now! No easy task it is to sway

'So wild a crew! Say, wilt thou ship with me?
Thou knowest well the main, art lithe and brave;
May'st soon be rich—so soon, perchance, that she
May keep her faith till then. If not the wave,
The fight, the change will teach thee to forget,
As I do hope; for who his truth hath set

'On woman, leans upon a broken reed,
And seeks his own undoing! Tell me now
What thou dost think!' He turned to mark with heed
The other's mind upon his brooding brow.
Soon doubt doth fly! He clasps his comrade's hand,
And cries, 'I follow thee by sea and land!'

END OF CANTO I.

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CANTO II.

Upon a shore where cliffs have left a line
Of sand to give the sea a deeper hue,
Some nets are spread; and now that day's decline
Has quenched the burning beam from out the blue,
One comes to take them ere the sudden fall
Of night clothe beach and main in chilly pall.

A woman is it, but of stalwart mould;
Inured to toil she seems; the rude attire
She wears is scant and close, nor veils the bold
Strong lines beneath. From out her eye the fire
Of youth still glows, though in the long dark hair
Above are snowflakes strewn by age and care.

Her brow is overcast! A sigh she breathes,
Still on her task intent. 'They linger long!'
Then, rising, gazes on the west, which wreaths
Of sunset still encircle; and a throng

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Of clouds now gather over, like a veil,
To hide the day-god's couch of light. No sail!

Her eyes sweep o'er the main, that growing gloom
Doth hide too fast, with long, unquiet gaze.
No sail! She turns to where the busy boom
Of breakers wakes the shore. The parting day's
Last gleam of light still lingers. Does she see
A bark so close to land? It cannot be!

She makes toward the spot. A skiff like those
That fishers use to take their scaly prey
Lies stranded on the beach. The breeze that blows
Just flaps her lazy sail; the billows play
About her keel, as loath to leave their prize.
Within—(do visions visit waking eyes?)—

Within a maiden lies in stillest sleep!—
A face of pallor hid by hanging hair;
Parched, heavy eyelids, which in vain to weep
Have longed, and sunk at last in dry despair.
On burning eyes they now in slumber close,
That seems a swoon, not nature's sweet repose.

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The garments, wet with spray, cling close around
Her form. One hand upon her breast is laid,
And tightly clasped, as if in sleep she found
A thing she long had sought, and were afraid
This dream would fade like others; so to keep
The vision vain did strive in restless sleep!

So much that other sees, while wonder turns
To pity in her face; then, bending o'er,
Draws up the bark that still the ocean spurns,
To find a rest upon the upper shore.
She lifts the weary form with gentle hand,
And swiftly bears it up toward the land.

In swoon-like slumber lies across her breast
The tender burden. Stiff, and icy chill,
The limbs hang down; the brow that long unrest
Has fevered into heat is throbbing still,
Though pale, above the cheeks that crimson glow,
Like blooming flowers beneath the mountain snow.

A giant form of ancient days appears—
That other 'mid the shades that gather o'er

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Her path. She gains the rock that vast uprears
His rugged brow to frown upon the shore;
In line beneath, some huts of rudest form
Are huddled close, as if they feared the storm.

She enters one. A few rough stools, a board,
A couch of rudest sort, on which the spoil
Of beasts is flung, are all her scanty hoard
Of gear or goods. Upon the naked soil
These ordered are. And now her load she lays
Upon the bed, and by the fitful rays

Of one small lamp her hand has lit, she sees
The fainting maid. With all a mother's care
She strives to chase the swoon. By slow degrees
It passes, and the eyes that shrouded were
In deathlike slumber open, and around
Are cast in waking wonder, while a sound,

So soft the ear might scarce its meaning take,
Comes through the parting lips. The scanty gleam
Of light—the homely hut—the form that spake
Soft soothing words, were like a morning dream

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Of peace to one who fell asleep in woe.
'Am I in Lipari?' she breatheth low.

'My daughter, no! To Susa have the wind
And waves conveyed thee, on the northern shore
Of Afric, and within the bounds confined
That gird the realm of Tunis. Speak no more,
But take thy rest! To-morrow thou shalt tell
Thy tale. Fear not! thou shalt be tended well.'

Like water on parched lips the Latin speech
Falls on the maiden's ear. The big drops well
From out her eyes, and healing which no leech
Had brought they bring. The heaving bosom's swell
Breaks that still sorrow, which is death without
Its peace, and life without its joy! A shout!

Another, on the sand! She starts, and clings
In fear to that one friend. 'Say, say who called?'
'Nay, fear thou not. 'Tis but that evening brings
The fishers back who on the ocean all
The day have been! I go to meet them. Sleep,
And nothing fear. The saints thy slumbers keep!'

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She speaks, and downward goes to where a group
Of fishers throng beside their boats, now laid
To rest, in whispered converse. See! they stoop
Above a prostrate man. A bier is made
Of planks, in haste together lashed. They bring
Him up; about him formed a heedful ring.

A sudden pallor clothes the woman's face.
'Say who is wounded? Who is this ye bear?'
The answer comes: 'Fear not! In saddest case
We found a stranger on an island, where
He surely must have perished; so to seek
Thy aid we brought him. Face and garb bespeak

'High birth and wealth.' So says, and steps before
His comrades out, a man whose iron frame
Long toil had hardened both on sea and shore,
About a spirit yet in all the same
As when a boy—as restless, free, and bold,
Yet tender. Fondly toward that woman old

He bends; then turns to those who with their load
Come slowly. 'Bear him in to where I rest!'

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He cries, and leads the way to his abode
Beside the one the first unlooked-for guest
Now finds repose within. Yet ruder here
Seems all! No couch is seen. They place the bier.

The man yet lies thereon. Beneath his head
And limbs some garments rude are spread, and o'er
His form a mantle cast, while light has shed
Upon his face a torch that on the shore
One stayed to kindle. With a heedful hand
That woman lifts the blood-besprinkled band

That binds his brow. As death the face is pale
Beneath the black but crimson-clotted hair;
A face on which no wight that gazed could fail
To read a soul of fire, and guess the glare
Would shoot from those shut eyes, once raised again
The lids that on them now long hours had lain.

A gash just where the hair doth hide the brow,
As from a Paynim sword, has freely bled.
They cleanse and dress it heedfully, and now
All go to seek their rest, save him who led

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Them up. He only and the woman keep
Close watch beside that swoon so long and deep.

So flies the night; and ere the morrow's sun
Has well arisen, put the fisher band
Again to sea: their daily toil begun,
The woman only follows from the land
With lingering look their sail, then bends a slow
Step toward the roof the maiden sleeps below.

Her hands lie on a breast that softly heaves
As doth a child's. The woman sits beside
The maiden's couch, which if anon she leaves,
'Tis but to tend the man, who still is tied
In fierce, unquiet, and in fevered heat;
Then comes to take again her former seat.

The slumber breaks. As one who thinks to dream
She looks around, nor trusts her waking eyes,
So strange is all, now brightened in the beam
Of morn! Yet all is peace, a mild surprise,
That stills her soul, nor leaves a place for pain,
A moment's space, and life seems new again.

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She sees the woman, yet in silence lies,
In wonder, or in fear to break the spell.
Old Carapresa then, in gentle guise,
Doth bend and speak: 'I long have watched and well;
I hope good rest was thine. What little we
Can give take freely. Plain it is to me

'Thou didst not grow 'mong fishers. Years ago
We came from Sicily to seek this shore,
Where fish abound; my son, who is, I trow,
Most skilled of all, and some few fellows more,
I with them. Here they toil upon the sea.
Pray whence art thou, if known the thing may be?'

The homely words, that in her native speech
Are spoken, sweetly sound; yet silence still
Doth lock her lips. She thinks on all and each
Of those past woes were wont her soul to fill,
As some free spirit who might live again
His former life, nor feel his former pain!

Then low she speaks at last: 'Upon an isle
That Lipari they call I lived and grew

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From that dear time when life is like the smile
Upon a father's face, and ever new,
In waking wonder, every dawning day
Makes earth and sky about our wanton way.

'Ah, well I yet do see the kindly light
Within my father's eye! I yet do hear
The voice that brought my soul a dear delight
I never thought to lose! Yet days were near
Of joy and sorrow, all unknown before.
Ah me! That day! that sea! that rugged shore!

'Enough! enough! I loved! I was again
Beloved too well! The tongues were false that told
Of his untruth, and that they spoke was vain!
Too bitter is the fight when love that's old
Doth grapple with the new! There came a change!
My love was gone, my sire was cold and strange!

'He said my love was lost,—that nevermore
He might return to me! I heard, and wept,
And heeded not, for in my heart I bore
His latest words, for in my heart I kept

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His latest look of love, that seemed to say,
" Fear not; I am thine own, though far away!"

' And now there came between my sire and me
The bar that keeps two loving souls apart,
When ever from the lips must banished be
A thought that ever fills the brooding heart.
We spoke of idle things, or spoke of nought,
And night was welcome, though no sleep it brought.

' I sought my couch, and wept: began again
At morn another day like that before;
And now, alas! upon a bed of pain
My sire was laid, and I, with little lore
Of leech's craft, would never leave his side,
And sought to soothe his pangs, and nought beside

' Was now within my heart. Too long he lay
Unknowing all. At length, as one from sleep
He woke, and looked on me; there seemed to play
About his lips a smile. His eye did keep
Its former light a moment while he said,
" Gostanza mine, be happy!" By the dead

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'They found me dead in seeming, and did bear
My fainting form to find a fevered rest;
And slow my life came back, but grief and care
Had sealed my lips, and long within my breast
I locked my sorrow, and that hope that beamed
The last for me, and yet a sin it seemed.

'So many days of pain were slowly past,
And I did dare to ask of him, who long
Upon the sea had been now first and last
To me on earth. Amid the menial throng
There was a silence; then a whisper went
From one to other, and above me bent,

'With tender, tearful eyes, the one whose care
Had been a mother's when my life was young,
And said in words that brought a dull despair
Where only grief had been—in words that rung,
And yet do ring, within my ears—that he
And his had found a grave beneath the sea.'

And here her voice did quiver, and was still
Awhile; then spake again, 'What need for more?

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I know not what did pass, for wit and will
Were lost and gone. They said I calmly bore
Such evil news, and hoped that all with me
Might soon be well. I did not hear or see

'The things about, but rose and wandered where
Had been my haunts of old, and thought to find
Two forms I loved, and found the mid-day glare,
The chill of night, the waves, the moaning wind;
And all was dead, and dead within my heart
Was that had been of old life's better part.

'By night I came to where the rocky strand
Doth rise above the waters waste and wild,
And looked, and longed to leave the luckless land
Where all was dead and dreary. Then I smiled,
As saner thoughts did come, to think this way
Might lead me where my loved and lost one lay.

'At last, in death, the never-broken troth
He strove in life to sunder joins the sea!
By storms and billows, in their surging wroth,
No more our dreamless sleep shall broken be.

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Such wild thoughts came: there came a wild desire
To fly this present pain, this inward fire!

'And now I saw upon the nearer wave
A skiff I once had loved in sport to guide
Across the bounding billows, laugh, and lave
A careless hand within the rushing tide.
I leapt upon it, loosed the bark from shore,
And made toward the deep with hasty oar;

'Then spread the sail, nor cared my course to steer,
But drifted on before the rushing wind!'
No hope was mine, nor had I ought of fear;
For death I sought, and death I left behind;
And death was in the sky and on the sea,
That heaved around, and seemed to gape for me!

'And soon the night did fall—a night of gloom,
With scarce a star to light the shrouded sky;
And now the death I sought became a doom
I might not shun; and hard it seemed to die
Alone, in darkness dread, upon the deep,
As years before I feared alone to sleep.

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'My anguish grew, until I wept, and rung
My hands, and cried aloud! Yet still was all
Save wind and wave; and down in fear I flung
My limbs at length, nor can my mind recall
What followed. Swoon or sleep did fall on me,
And when I woke it was to look on thee!'

And now with tears her thanks are spoken, now
Her mood has melted to a grief that lies
About her soul, like mists about the brow
Of hills in summer, when the deeper dyes
Of sunlight soften, in the chastened air,
To hues are wont to shun the mid-day glare.

That other, hearing all, and taking part
Of that she hears, in homely words and kind
Doth strive to cheer again the maiden's heart,
Nor stays her tears that now a way must find,
Like pent-up waters, in the weary pain
Seemed past but now, her tale has waked again.

Her grief grows stiller. In a tender tone
Old Carapresa speaks: 'Wilt take thy rest

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Awhile? Nay, fear not thou to be alone!
But one is here beside, and now 'tis best
I go to tend him. Hither him they bore
Last night from far—alone, and wounded sore.'

'Nay,' saith the maid, 'I pray thee let me go
With thee, for I would rise; and though my hand
Be weak, yet help it may. Too well I know
The bed of pain, and in the sea-girt land
I loved, they ever said some skill was mine
To tend the sick. My foot shall follow thine!'

In vain that other strives the maid to keep
Upon her couch; then yields, and goes her way
To where the stranger lies in swoon or sleep,
Yet rest may never find—the peaceless prey
Of fiercest fever, tossing to and fro
With muttered curses on a figured foe.

Gostanza, rising, clothes in rude attire—
The woman's gift—her slender form, and goes,
With limbs that tremble, where the fevered fire
Doth feed upon his brain. But feebly flows

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Her life-blood yet; and all the willing soul
Within can but with pain her limbs control.

And now, with heedful hands and kindly care,
They tend the man, then take their place beside
The lowly bed, till fast to night doth wear
The day again. Once more the eventide
Will bring the fishers back. Again to raise
The nets the woman goes—the maiden stays.

The maiden stays, as doth a willow-tree
Above a torrent, roused to wild unrest
By melting snows in spring. She bends to see
If yet the fever flies, for now the breast
That long has hotly heaved is stiller—now
A pallid peace doth soothe the throbbing brow.

She bends above the stranger, but to meet
The eager gaze of eyes that darkly glow
In waking wonder. Ere his lips repeat
The dumb desire, she bids him rest in low
And gentle words, nor doubt that all is well.
'Yet, lady, who art thou—I pray thee tell?'

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He speaks, and looks as on a storied saint
  Who helps the helpless, nor has power to say
Ought else save broken words, so hoarse and faint
  They may not reach her ear. 'Peace, peace! I pray,
If thou wouldst live,' she saith, then tells in few
Brief words the things she knows. Like morning dew

Her voice doth fall upon his weary heart.
  He lies in silence, seeking to recall
The past, yet looks on her whose gentle art
  Now smooths his troubled couch, and orders all
About; for now, to take her former place,
The elder comes. She goes, nor marks the face

Of him who fain would keep her by his side.
  The days pass on, and by the kindly care
Of both he lives again, no longer tied
  To that sad fevered couch; but ever were
Men hard to please, and scarce the stranger knows
If joy has come with health and still repose.

For now the maid who once was wont to tend
  His couch so kindly keeps aloof, and cold

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And silent seems. No jest of his may bend
Her mood to mirth. 'At heart she seemeth old,
As is that other whom she never now
Will leave!' he says, and wears a gloomy brow.

Yet times will come when they must be alone,
And much he speaks, and little she doth hear;
So on a day is Carapresa gone
Awhile away. Gostanza fain, in fear,
Had followed her, but still a nurse's hand
Must tend the stranger's wound. Where girds the land

A chain of rocks he takes his wonted seat;
She seeks him there, and while her fingers bind
His brow right deftly, words of worship meet
Her ears, that love them not. She fain would find
A way to change the theme, and asks to know
Of him and of his haps in weal and woe.

'The tale is long, I pray thee therefore stay
Awhile with me, nor scorn this rugged throne
Of rock! Nay, here below my limbs I'll lay.'
She fain would fly, but in the words a tone

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There is that bends her will. She takes the seat.
Thus runs his tale who lies beside her feet:—

'Too long, O lady, were it now to tell
Of all my haps; nor were they meet, I trow,
For ears like thine. Our life is fierce and fell
Who on the brine do dare both flood and foe.
'Tis gold and glory or an ocean grave!
For ruth we seldom show, nor ever crave.

'Enough! I rose to sway the fearless band
I followed from the first upon the sea!
We fought and conquered; brought again to land
Our blood-bought booty. Here our life was free
And gay while wealth did last, and blessed our toil,
For Holy Church did share our Paynim spoil.

'And then our roving sail was set again!
So left we last Sicilia's sea-girt shore
To seek the faithless Moor upon the main
He harries most. A full and fair wind bore
Our ship upon her course, and by the isle
Of Lipari we passed, and fain awhile

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'Would land for water or some other need.
(Thou start'st; ay, I did hear that island blest
Was once thy home.) I lay, with little heed
Of ought, upon the strand, right glad to rest
Once more on mother earth awhile, when slow
A man came down as worn by wasting woe.

'He sat him down, nor seemed to hear or see.
I made toward the spot, and looked, when, lo!
A friend right dear of other days was he
When boys at Naples both. I learnt to know
His cause of grief! To thee I need not say
'Twas love, that sweetest, saddest sorrow! Nay!

'I had no thought to move thee thus! My tale
Shall cease! No, thou wilt hear it! Yet in tears!
Be calm, I pray! What means this bitter bale
For, but one friend of mine in former years?
I will not grieve thy heart! Nay, do not plead;
My law from out thine eyes I fain would read!

'So speak as thou dost bid. The man did tell
His grief to me; and I, who thought to play

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A friendly part, and knew his mood full well,
Did bid him join our band, nor make delay,
And throw for death or riches; for he said
'Twas this he lacked alone his love to wed.

'He shipped with us. We put to sea, and far
Did follow fortune. Ever in the fight,
He played with death, as one whose evil star
Made life a thing of nought. An arm of might,
A nimble foot were his, and all the art
A man doth need to play the leader's part.

'So soon he came to hold the next command
To mine, and envy's self had found no blame
In him, save only that of heart and hand
He tender was, and in the deadly game
Would cease too soon, in pity, ere the steel
Had done its work, nor think his heedless heel

'Was on a serpent's head might bite once more.
My men did love him, for his words were kind;
His arm was strong to help when sickness sore,
Or burning wounds were theirs to heal and bind.

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I loved him from of old, yet sought in vain
For that bright boy, untouched as yet by pain.

'And yet, at times, I thought to mark the smile
Had been his own before the evil day
About his lips; at times he seemed awhile
What once he was, or yet more loudly gay,
But like a flash the mirth was quenched once more,
And soon his brow to deeper darkness wore.

'I strove in vain to cheer his drooping heart.
For hours his limbs upon the deck were laid,
His head upon his hand; then would he start
As if from sleep, and speak as one afraid
His grief is guessed at, who would fain conceal
The thing his every word and look reveal.

'It fell upon a day—a day of light
And shadow on our path from clouds above
That flecked the dappled deep with spots of night
To mock the mid-day blaze—as flies a dove
To seek her nest, our ship, with swelling sail,
Bore on as though she loved the friendly gale!

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'And all, save those whose part it was to guide
The bounding bark, were laid at listless ease;
About the deck some wistful scanned the wide
Domain of ocean; some did seek to please
Their vacant hours with song, or gathered near
A comrade famed for tales of love or fear.

'Some all unknowing seemed of things around,
And lived in joy or grief that none might share;
Words spoke hard by to them were empty sound.
On things we might not see, or foul or fair,
Their eyes were set; their spirits lived once more
In bygone years, and sought their native shore.

'Of these was he of whom I spake but now,
The youth well loved of all. I long had sought
To chase the care from off his brooding brow,
But all in vain, for yet, in thankless thought,
He strove with shadows, nor might hope to slay
The figured foe that wore his life away.

'I turned, to shun the ever-present pain
Upon his face, and gaze across the sea,

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When quick there came a shout. Again, again!
And yet again! "A sail!" "Nay, can it be?"
"It is! it is!" and like the rising gale
That bodes a storm, they cry, "A sail! a sail!"

'Till from full threescore throats the shout did crash—
Full threescore lusty forms in haste arose—
Full threescore burnished blades aloft did flash
Full threescore eyes beneath for blood and blows—
And wild and high full threescore hearts did leap
To see that speck upon the furthest deep:

'For we did follow her in swifter course,
And soon each eye had marked a Paynim foe.
And now, as best I might, my well-proved force
I ranged for fight; and soon in ordered row
Were all; and now to each his post I gave.
From out the prow a band long-tried and brave

'My friend should lead, whose heart I strove to cheer
Before in vain, but now was he the best
Among the brave; myself, from where they steer
The bark, another. He who held the rest

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In sway the while should gall with darts the foe,
Nor strike, unless to aid our arms a blow.

'And now we nearer drew, and still was all
As death; in every hand a hungry sword
Or dart clenched tight, before the gleaming wall
Of steel-girt breasts, that on the moving board
Were firm as on the land. On every face
I looked, and read good hope. And now the chase

'Had brought us near; and now we might descry
The pirate bark, nor doubt we found a foe
To all the Christian name. She strove to fly,
But strove in vain; and soon we all might know,
By clash of arms, and steel that twinkled bright,
These dogs accursed did nerve them for the fight!

'And now their shafts come thick and fast, and cries
Of heathen hate and fear do fill the air.
No word we speak, from us no arrow flies;
We crouch like lurking lions when the lair
Is close bestead, that wait a surer prey,
Till side by side with theirs our ship we lay.

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'And then a shout the very sky might rend!
We grapple her! A lion-leap to gain
Her cumbered deck, and quick our blows we blend
With theirs; and close and sure a deadly rain
Of darts is poured by some who yet do stand
Upon our deck—a small but well-skilled band!

'What need of more? Right soon our conquering lines
Have swept from either end the heathen horde.
A space between, of narrow bounds, confines
Them now, and still our red avenging sword
Drinks blood; and louder grows the shout and cry,
And thicker yet the stricken forms do lie.

'We press them hard, and wild despair makes brave
Their fainting hearts, and fiercer grows the fight.
A deadly grapple! Who would shun the grave
Had need be lithe of limb! for arms of might
Have dropped their swords and bared the dagger's blade,
Or on the foeman's throat strong hands have laid.

'And forms that roll together in their blood,
With curses deep, and looks of horrid hate,

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And dying men who rise in tiger mood
To strike once more, and find at last their fate
Upon a fallen foe, do cover all
The deck. Then fiercer on the foe doth fall

'The band from out the prow! In rear they take
The fainting band, and there the battle-din
And dying shrieks are loudest. "Now to slake
Our vengeance for the dead, now spoil to win,
The hour is come! They waver, see! they fly!"
We charge! They break, or battle but to die!

'One little band alone did keep their place
Upon the middle deck. A hoary sire
Did lead it on. His locks and reverend face
Did tell of many years that might not tire
His arm, which swayed a red and reeking brand.
To stay our course he took his stedfast stand.

'The snowy beard that swept his brawny breast,
His valiant heart, his look of high disdain,
Did move all men to pity. From the rest
I stepped with one tried friend: "What good or gain

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Can come from fight?" he spake, for best he knew
Their tongue. "Yield now, and this thou shalt not
rue."

'His eye flashed fire, as back in thunder came
The words, "Thou dog! go offer terms in hell!
Nor think to stain with fear my father's name!"
And quick as heaven's bolt the sabre fell
Upon the man who spake, and clove in twain
His steel-clad head, and scattered blood and brain

'Full in my face. Then, "Go to seek thy friend!"
He spake to me; and with the streaming sword
Smote strong and true. I there had found an end
Of all the ills that roaming lives afford,
But swift as he had struck did turn the blow,
And now to meet my death, or lay him low!

'Ere he might strike again, a deadly thrust
I dealt upon his breast, and drove the blade
Right through; and as a bear doth bite the dust
Beside a tooth-torn hound, his form was laid,
With crashing fall, across the man he slew;
Then back, with pain, my bloody brand I drew!

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'The rest now scattered wide in reckless rout,
And on we rushed, like water making way
From out new-broken bounds. One sounding shout
Rang loud and long, and nought our course might stay
Until we met our friends in proud career
Of conquest. Conquest bought, alas! too dear!

'For some were dead, and many wounded sore.
That hero youth had led his valiant few
'Gainst twofold odds, and nought might stand before
Their charge when he, the younger leader, slew
In desperate fight who held the forward place.
We stood a moment locked in close embrace.

'Then turned in kindness to the cowering foes,
Who yet did hold the deck, a frighted few,
And bade them yield, nor doubt that now their woes
Should have an end. Their arms they dropped; the crew
Did bind them fast; and now beneath we sought
The rest. Some hid in holes; some crouched and caught

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'Fast hold of what they might in witless fear,
We scarce might chase away; some fell before
Our feet and rent their clothes; and far and near
Was mad despair. Who had least scanty store
Of Moorish words spoke comfort while they took
And bound them fast. Within the darkest nook

'Of all the hold five Christian men we found,
Of Frankish blood, in rags and clanking chain,
And wept to hear their lips with feeble sound
Shower blessings on our heads, and tears like rain
Poured down their pallid cheeks. Each wasted form
To our own ship we brought amid the storm

'Of sounding shouts that rang again, again,
And yet again more loud, from each and all;
Then turning, came to where in blood and pain
The wounded lay, whom we might yet recall,
And found, where that old man did lie alone,
A sight had moved to tears a heart of stone;

'For by him sat a girl of tender age,
Who on her lap her father's head did lay,

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And strove with anxious yearning to assuage
The crimson tide that from his wound made way;
And pressed her lips upon his marble brow,
And whispered words he might not answer now.

'And yet she whispered on, and yet she hung
Above his death-set face and riven breast,
Like some poor bird who, come to feed her young,
Has found a harried home—an empty nest;
And drooping on the bough, to those who hear
No more doth call, nor leaves that desert dear.

'So she to that cold frame, whence life had fled,
Did cling, and call, and fondle, till no more
Of hope might be; then raised her drooping head,
And looked till sight with bursting tears was sore,
And with a cry, like some wild thing in pain,
Fell on her sire and wailed—nor moved again!

'Martino (so my gentle comrade hight)—
Nay, is the tale too sad for woman's ears,
That so I see thee weep? Do thoughts of fight
And death appal thy heart? And shall thy fears

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Be roused by me? Thou still dost bid me say
What followed. Fear not; I thy will obey.

'Martino bent above the cowering maid,
And in the voice that women use to still
A sobbing child did speak, and softly laid
His arm about her, while big drops did fill
His kindly eye. She rose, and looked in fear
About, as on the hounds a startled deer,

'Then shrieked, and fain would fly; but still he clasped
Her slender form, and in the tongue she knew
Spoke on in soothing words; and now she grasped
His hand for aid, for all about the crew
In arms did stand: from them she turned, and shook,
And up to that one friend in fear did look.

He bore her from that ship of fate and fray
To ours that lay beside, and bade them bring
Her women there, who for the evil day
Had found their lord, did stand and wail and wring
Their hands upon his ship, for none had bound
Or caged them in; and soon they stood around

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'The girl, and at his word whose kindly care
Had eased her lot, brought down and laid to rest
Her weary form below. And now we bare
The wounded back; and ere the purpled west
Did tell of parting day, beneath the sea
The dead were laid; the deck was cleansed and free.

'And men we placed with one who should command
Within that captured ship, and made our way
To fair Palermo. There we put to land
Our captive foes, and lived from day to day
Awhile a jovial life, for rich in gold
And stuff the ship was found that pirate old

'Did own, and much it held of Christian spoil.
We thought the Paynim maid to bring to shore,
And place with some who in that untilled soil
Would sow the Christian seed; but evermore
She seemed to love Martino, and would pray
With tears that near her friend she yet might stay.

'And so with us, when once again we put
To sea, and said farewell to mirth and ease,

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It did befall that yet her slender foot
Was on the plunging plank; who best did please
Her mood, from out her women she did bring
With her to roam. Yet ever would she cling

'To him whose heart had helped her sorest need.
Her fairy form beside his feet would lay,
And seek upon his brow the griefs to read
That left it not; or if a moment gay
He seemed, and smiled on her, would laugh in joy
With childish words, and every wile employ

'To lead him on to mirth. At times was all
In vain! His head again in grief was bowed,
And nought to life that banished beam might call
To light his look of gloom; and soon the cloud
Did fall on her. She cowered, and shrunk away
To weep alone, or pine in dull dismay.

'At times the unlearnt art was with the child,
Had power to charm away his peaceless pain;
And kindly words he spake, and oft he smiled
On her, and day by day more fond and fain

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To be with her he seemed, and day by day
That demon loosed him from its iron sway.

'And well we loved the maid that raised so dear
A man from dark despair, and smiled to see
How more and more 'twas hers his heart to cheer.
At times to learn our speech her will might be,
And queries quaint would come in quainter dress,
Till we must laugh, he chide, nor laugh the less.

'And still he liker that he once had been
Became; would tell her tales, and stop to show
How this did hap, or how that pictured scene
Was thus unlike to all her thought might know.
He blither grew with us, though times were yet
That told of things the heart may not forget.

'For he loved beauty well, and like a dream
That crowns a festal night when wine goes free
She was! I see, beneath its raven stream
Of hair, her brow that scorned all art; I see
Her great eyes' liquid light that seemed to glow
With half-quenched beam from fires they feared to show!

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'Her cheek like sun-kissed snow that crowns a hill,
Her rosebud mouth a smile would make full blown;
Her breast that, like a fitful breeze, would fill
In love or fear the robe in envy thrown
About its lurking charms; her tender frame,
In freedom fair, no cramping garb might lame!

'So passed the days, until one morning-tide
We lay becalmed upon the silent sea!
No breeze might break the plain so waste and wide,
Or flap the empty sail; and fain were we
To pass the drowsy hours in slumber deep,
Or sport as idle, save who watch must keep.

'Of these was I, for in my heart a fear
There was of that smooth seeming on the breast
Of ocean; so I trod in quick career
The silent deck, and soon my eye did rest
On that had moved a graver wight to smile.
Martino sat upon an ordered pile

'Of sailors' gear before the rising poop,
She close beside his knees, while soft and low

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He spake, and toward her eager face did stoop
To tell the tale; and oft she begged to know
Of something strange to her, or what a word
Might mean that ne'er till now her ear had heard.

'And now the story ended, now she spake
In broken speech that well her artless tongue
Became of that she heard, and he did make
Right tender answers back, and fondly hung
Above her more and more, and on doth steal
About her form a hand her locks conceal.

'No more I saw, for now the sleeping wind
Awoke, as wakes the forest's tawny king,
And raised a mane of clouds, and came to find
His prey with threatening roar; and up did fling
The bursting billows on his foam-flecked way,
That tossed their tumbling tops like fiends at play.

'To see and speak were one; yet scarce the crew,
In headlong haste, might furl the flapping sail,
And clear the cumbered deck, when with the blue
Above the day was gone; and faces pale,

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And forms that quivered as at crack of doom,
We saw, then saw no more amid the gloom!

'And now upon her side the ship was flung,
A stayless straw before the rushing blast;
A moment on the wave we helpless hung!
A moment heaven's fire unveiled the vast
And moving depth! Then toward the fate, by sight
Made plain, we sank through shades of starless night.

'And one fell shriek that echoes in my heart
Arose, in silence hushed that yet more dread
Did seem; for each had clutched with sudden start
The other's form, as if the clay-cold dead
Found human comfort in an ocean grave!
That moment past, once more we topped the wave,

'And looked around through shades less murky grown
Upon the boiling brine, nor much might do
To help the battered bark. Away was thrown
The mast in haste; and then I gathered who
Were least affrighted overboard to cast
The water. So perchance the hulk might last

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'Until in storm-tossed course we ran aground.
But most were helpless now in wild despair—
Some knelt and called their saints, or gathered round
A comrade who might chance a charm to wear;
Some wrung their hands and raved, or, cursing, cried
Out horrid oaths, and heaven and hell defied!

'He much did need, who held that sea-swept space
Against the rushing waves, an iron frame,
As on full long we sped, in reeling race,
We knew not whence or where. At last there came
A giant sea behind, that tore away
The upper prow and helm. A wreck we lay

'Upon the water wild. And now 'twas o'er,
Nor many moments off the end could be,
When "Land!" a man did shout. A rocky shore
Rose close ahead above the surging sea!
I cried, "Let him who hopes to shun the wave
Hug plank or spar, for nought the ship can save!"

'And some made ready all their nigh-spent might,
And some were wailing loud and weeping sore;

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And nearer loomed the rugged ridge in sight,
And on—and on, with arrow speed, we bore,
Till one great breaker raised our bark on high,
And dashed her on the rocks that seaward lie.

'A horrid crash! A moment's death-like gloom
Beneath the wave! and on a broken spar
I rode above the place of wreck and doom,
And saw in floods of foam, both near and far,
Full many floating beams, and forms that fast
Clung to them. Then again the flood had passed

'Above my head, and nought I now could see,
But on was borne with that one beam that gave
My heart a hope. A moment more must be
My death or life! for quick the bursting wave
Did bear me to the beach, and helpless threw
Against a rising rock of those that strew

'That coast with hidden death. With iron arm
I clasped it now, and when the backward flow
Had left it dry, made on, and free from harm
Did reach the upper shore. 'Twas but to know

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How few of those that formed my trusty band
Were safe from death upon the sea-girt land.

'Scarce one in ten! 'Mong these a maiden lay,
And one above her bent. Could this be he—
Martino? See! he wipes the brine away
From her unknowing brow, and both are free
From death! And now a heartfelt greeting each
Did give the other, yet was spare of speech.

'And now we looked around. On either side
The cliffs arose, but here were broken through
By one great gap, to which the saints did guide
Our random course, for else from out the crew
No man, I ween, had 'scaped to tell the tale.
We climbed that gentle slope to shun the gale.

'Above, where arching rocks had formed a cave,
We shelter found and rest; and here did bring
The maid again to life—whom he did save—
I loved so well. With tears she now did cling
To him, and prayed him by her side to stay.
He answered kindly, yet he answered—"Nay,"

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'And fain would follow me, who now must go
To view that lonely isle, and strive to find
Some food for fainting frames; and still, though low
And dim, the hope did burn that, from the wind
And billows safe, some friends had found the strand
Where like they were to need a helping hand.

'A trusty comrade placed to guard her rest,
We left the cave upon our upward way,
And scaled with weary limbs and troubled breast
The rugged path where rocks in ruin lay,
As if the cliff that rose to left and right
Were riven here by some unearthly might.

'We gained a height whence far and wide the eye
Might sweep across the deep. And now the gale
Had sunk to gusts, that with a weary sigh
Would chill the cheerless heart, or wildly wail,
As if to mourn their woeful work now done,
And those who might not greet that conquering sun.

'For in the west, from out his cloudy pyre,
He broke, and robed the cliffs in tender light,

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And gemmed the falling foam with flecks of fire,
And made the billow tops in bounding bright
Above the darker depths that yawned between,
Like haunts of death, and shunned the kindly sheen.

'And nought of life was there, save one lone bird;
On high she flew, and shrieked as if to tell
Of that within our hearts had found no word.
I turned, and on his face my dimmed eye fell
Who by me stood, and met a tearful gaze,
Yet sure not all of pain, or wherefore plays

'That lurking light within it? Nought I said.
We turned, and went our way along the height
That crowned the rocks. On either side was spread
The ocean now; and long our weary sight,
Our weary ears for aught of hope we strain,
For nought of hope was there. 'Twas toil in vain!

'Until we gained the point that bounds the isle
Toward the west; and now the night was here
Not all of gloom, as passed from pile to pile
Of cairnèd clouds the moon, and spangled clear

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On scraps of sky that roofed the changing flaw
Amid the rack some friendly stars we saw.

'And by their light turned back to find our way,
"Martino," then I said, "'tis well for thee
That she thou lovest sees the light of day;
And had I heart for joy, thy joy should be
Mine own!" He murmured, "Little dost thou know!"
I marvelled at his face! Then spake he low:

'"A woman in the isle I left with thee
Was my eye's light by day, my dream by night!
A beacon-blaze that made my life to be,
Though dark and rough with reefs, seem brave and bright.
Thou knowest how I lost my hope, and came
To gather gold and win a warrior's fame,

"And how my heart was sad; then glad once more
Did seem; for well I thought to love the child
For pity's sake, and for the charm she wore
About her fairy form and face that smiled
In winning want of that had been so dear
Upon another's brow. This day of fear

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'"Did break the spell! for in the darkest hour,
Where by my side I propped that fainting form,
I saw another stand in placid power,
And face with eyes undimmed the raging storm,
Then turn to me and smile and whisper clear,
'If death doth join us, death himself is dear.'

'"Her smile was like a heavenly beam to bless
My sinking soul with hope; a strength unknown
Till then did nerve the arm was free to press
That figured love, who so seemed fairer grown,
As they may fairer be who break this coil
Of flesh, than those who yet on earth must toil.

'"And her I saved from out that boiling brine;
And still I heard her say, 'Be blithe and bold;
In life or death I now am ever thine;
And thou art mine, although the waters cold
Go over us.' And hard I strove to save
My love, and lost her when above the wave!

'"I woke to life; yet hers I am once more.
What should this vision bode or bliss or bane?"

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He ceased; I answered not, but on we bore
Our burdened hearts, nor sought to ease their pain,
Till down we made toward the cave where slept
The stranger maid, and watch our comrade kept.

'We reached the cave. Without, to left and right,
The weary sailors slept or wakeful lay,
Save him who guard had been; and now to light
The inner gloom with hand and foot did stay
A burning brand. He cried, "Who comes?" and so
The others, "We!" "With hope or helpers?" "No!"

'And now from out the cave, with sudden bound,
The girl did leap, and clasp Martino's knee;
From out her parted lips there came a sound
Of joy that found not words. Her locks flowed free
About the pallid face and quaking form;
Then came the bursting tears in stayless storm.

'He bent him down, with kindly words and low,
Loosed straight her clasp, and raised her slender frame,
Then led her clinging yet, and fain to throw
Her weary weight on him, with cheek of flame

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And eye that swimming sunk, then rose and cast
A wistful look of wondering woe. They passed

'Within the grot, and straight he came once more.
We slept awhile. What need to tell thee all?
Some weary days did pass in hunger sore
And weary waiting. Still did weep and call
On him nor leave an hour that child. We gave
The most of that was ours; yet near the grave

'She seemed, and wailed as evermore in pain;
Nor might we help her need, for day by day
Our strength and store grew less. One night had lain
Our weary band asleep (how long to say
Were hard); together he and I beside
The cave, when with a start I woke, and spied

'Upon the shore, beneath the flickering glare
Of torches, turbaned forms that onward came,
With measured tread and sabres glittering bare,
As high they waved beside the lurid flame.
In haste the garb of Tunis mark I might,
And shouted loud, but time was none for flight,

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'For like a flood they came. Martino first,
No well awake, they seized and swiftly bound,
As sword in hand I flew the ring to burst;
It might not be, for one fell sabre found
My fenceless forehead. Next I woke to see
Thy face, and ask what angel cared for me.'

Gostanza hears as one who, in a dream,
Doth see a dear friend's face now laid to rest,
And true, for very joy it scarce doth seem.
Then fear that yet another ghostly guest
Has come to break the peace that follows pain,
While still it lingers, makes the vision vain.

She hears, and weeps for joy, and doubts once more,
And weeps for doubt, and weeps again in fear
For him, the first in fight, who backward bore
The Paynim horde; and every healing tear
Doth ease her laden heart, for fear is one
With hope. No storms make night beneath the sun.

And now she starts, and now her cheek doth glow
With hectic flush, her eyes with sudden fire

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Do burn the bursting drops, and seek to know
From out his own who speaks, with keen desire,
The thing his tongue too slowly tells, and proud
And stern she seems, who late in sorrow bowed.

On flows the tale, and soon the tender tide
Comes fast again from eyes that seek the ground,
On cheeks that now from all the world would hide
Their bright betrayal, and the bursting bound
The poor heart gives, that sure, within her breast,
His heedful eye must mark, nor miss the rest.

And soon once more he speaks: 'O lady, now
Thy will is done, I pray that this thy pain
Be not from fault of mine!' Her bended brow
She lifts anew, and stays the tears that stain
Her cheek with painful power, and answers low
(Ah, traitor tongue, why wilt thou tremble so?)

'Nay, gentle sir, and fain my words would meet
This kindly grace of thine, and fain would say
The thing I feel. But silent thanks are sweet
To those whose speech is slow! And till the day

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When it doth beat no more, thy voice will tell
My heart of things it weeps to love so well!

'Yet I would ask of those of whom at last
Thou didst'—— 'Ah, lady! was it mine to please
Thy heart! Those words again! I pray thee cast
Thine eyes once more on me!' 'Thou broughtest ease
Where pain had been. Yet this—Nay, I would go!'
'Stay! hear! I swear thou shalt not answer no!

'Thou art my life, and death it were to part;
Say, say the words I crave, and nought beside;
Thou canst not know the pang within my heart
That drave me first to seek the waters wide,
And make my home beneath the roving sail,
A brittle toy to tempt each changing gale.

'I loved and lost; a fickle fairy sprite,
I think, and not a woman. Vows and tears
Her weapons were, a melting mien her might
To hold the heart she stabbed. Hot iron scars
Him most who grasps it hardest. Evermore
That dart did rankle in my bosom's core.

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'And life did seem to me a waste of woe,
Where nothing was of worth save lust and wine,
Until a woman's heart I learnt to know.
But now, unwont to woo, these lips of mine
Must say in one, "I love," a thousand more
They once had said at large, while yet the store

'Of dainty words—that make the wealth of boys—
Was mine. Nay! speak, I pray; wilt make me mad
With waiting? Like a leaf the wild wind toys,
She shook and faltered forth, "Of that I had
Thou shouldst not ask in vain. This——" "Prithee tell
Me all thy thought!" "Another!" "Death and hell!"

'Another stands betwixt thy love and me.
Then death to him! Full little dost thou know
The man I am—the thing in wrath can be!
And by this sword! were every fiend below
In guard of thee, my course they should not stay.
I brook no bidding; no man's 'hest obey!

'And mine thou art, and here I take my own!'
He rose; but quick, as might a light-limbed deer

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To shun a lion's leap, with strength unknown,
She gained the upper rock, and woman's fear
Had scaled a height that boldest men were fain
To shun. He sees, and back with baffled brain

Reels dizzy down the shore—his darkening eyes
Upon the form and face that bent but now
Above his own in tender, tearful guise—
That look of fire and hate, that wrathful brow,
Seem darting death, as some unearthly power
Might smite an impious head in evil hour.

He hears her cry: 'Thou man of basest mould,
Take that thou canst. The rocks are high; the sea
Beneath is deep, and that it hath can hold,
Where all untouched it is by things like thee.
Say! dost thou think, were death a fear of mine,
I here had been? Fool! seek thy lust and wine.'

He heard, then heard no more. The cliffs did quake
As if to whelm his guilt! And nought he knew
Till once again his blood-blind eyes, awake
To dimmest day, might mark a form that drew

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A band about the brow, that ached again,
And words dropped softly on the weary brain.

'Be still, for weak thou art, and nought at all
May'st do but what I will—else might not be
Thy need my care—else speech of mine might fall
No more upon thine ear. Yet now to thee,
In this poor plight, I tell my need; I crave
Thy helpless hand my love, my life to save!

'The man who was thy friend, to me was more
Than friend and home, and that we deem most dear
When life is young. Enough! in bondage sore
He wears his life away. I will not fear
His death! Ah, no! The saints would mock my pain
Were this one gleam of kindly hope in vain.

'But now in chains he toils, and wasting woe;
He counts the weary hours, and bids the day
Be short, and deems the sun in sinking slow.
Ah! does he dream of those who, far away,
May think on him—may bring a slow release?
Of one—'tis time for toil! Peace, fond heart! peace!

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'I go to him! My woman's fear lies deep
Beneath the wave where rest I thought to find.
I go to him! Nor flood nor mountain steep
Shall stay my course! I fear the raging wind
No whit, that bears me on where I would be!
O love, fear not; ere long thou shalt be free!

'And yet—and yet full many men of blood
Do lurk upon the way. A woman's arm
Is weak. Be thou my guard by land and flood.
We trust thee both, to him by ought of harm
Unscathed, to bring this feeble frame. Thou art
His friend. Be mine! I know thy loyal heart.'

She spake and clasped his hand, that quaking gave
A grasp again, as slow from off the ground
He rose, and seated, looked as who did rave
In fever late on her. The lips around
His fast-set teeth were shut; his iron frame
Pent passion's power shook hard, and fanned the flame

That burned in those wild eyes. And still she bent
To meet their lurid light, nor turned away.

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From out her bosom's fold her hand had hent
A carvèd cross. She on his lips did lay
The saving sign, 'Swear now.' A voice did tear
Its way from out his heart, 'I swear, I swear!'

'Then go we back, and now thou shalt be mine,
As I thy care one day.' With pain he rose
To lean on her, as might a smitten pine
Upon a willow when the strong wind blows.
They take their tardy way above the main,
And soon are seen the lowly huts again.

Where now the home-come fishers gather, now
The evening fire doth light with gladding gleam
Each rugged face, and cup and jest do go
Around with laughter loud. 'To-day, I deem,
Full well our friends have sped,' the maid doth say
To him she props upon his weary way.

And now their leader marks his guests, who slow
Do skirt the bouldered beach, and quick doth rise,
And haste with kindly care their needs to know.
'I fear me harm hath chanced. The foot that tries

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This strand had need be firm. Good sir, too sore
Was your late harm for this.' He spoke, and bore

The wounded man aloft like any child.
'Nay, lady, nay. No task was this for thee.
Why didst not ask our aid?' The rest had piled,
In haste, a skin-clad couch, where laid might be
The listless limbs, and propped the heavy head.
He lay as one asleep, nor aught had said.

A draught of wine they gave, and left him now
To needful rest, the while the maiden still,
With fast-pressed lip, bent eye, and brooding brow,
Did sit amid the throng. They straight did fill
Her cup, and food they brought. She answered, 'Nay,
Good friends; O thank you well, but that must say

'That now is in my heart, ere food may bring
The strength I need. A friend long lost and dear
Doth wear the Paynim yoke. An idle thing
It is to weep. Your pardon! Pray you hear
What kindly hearts will bring across the sea
To Tunis town this wounded knight and me.

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'But little have I here. This chain of gold
Is all, and freely yours with thanks shall be!'
'Nay, lady, curse on him whose help is sold
To those in need. Our hands shall take no fee
Of thine for this. 'Tis nought! For, sooth to say,
Full soon had thither led our wonted way.

'They know us well, nor hurt our humble toil,
Who hold the place. Then let no fear be thine;
In peace we give for gain our storèd spoil,
Or buy the thing we lack. 'Tis but a sign
From thee, and forth we fare. Yet scarce in guise,
Methinks, is he for this who wounded lies.'

With sudden start he half uprose who held
His peace till now, and bright with former fire
His eye did seem that swoon of pain had quelled
Awhile. 'Short time of rest doth now require
This wound of mine, nor long your course I swear
Shall stay! Yet mark! Who hopes from bonds to tear

'A friend hath need of gold. I here did keep,'
A laden pouch from out his breast he drew,

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'Of mine a part, and though my swoon was deep,
It 'scaped the pirates' grasp. Yet know ye who
Shall guard our right. These dogs, methinks, might say,
"The gold is ours! Take now the slave who may:

'"Nay, here are other twain who come unsought!"
And lay us fast in bitter bonds to pine,
So lost were we, and this our aid unbrought
To him we seek. Of this what thought is thine?'
A moment silence kept, then musing spake
The fisher: 'Sir, I well your fear do take,

'Nor know what best were done! Yet heard I late
A Christian should lead on against the foe
The power of Tunis. Well, I think your fate
Would move his heart, O lady! Who doth know
How bonds do bite will pity captives' pain,
And once, if sooth be said, he wore the chain.'

'So seek we him ere many days be past,'
The stranger spake; the maid, 'So let it be.'

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The fisher, 'Grant the saints ye find full fast
The man ye seek!' The rocks that crown the sea
They scale, and up with heed the wounded bear,
Then straight to sleep or wakeful watch repair.

END OF CANTO II.

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CANTO III.

A FISHER bark is bounding o'er the brine!
The bulging sail bears down the quivering mast!
Loud creak the cords, as pants to reach the sign
Of rest a steed that long has followed fast
A wearied way! for gleaming full in sight
Lies Tunis town, and fronts the morning light!

A wight well wont, I trow, such craft to steer
The tiller turns, while women twain beside
His strong right hand are set. In goodly gear
And rich, though something worn by time and tide,
A warrior form doth hold the left; and two
Stout fishers in the prow are all the crew.

The maiden next the poop is bending low,
Like one who hears soft music far away.
Bright burns her cheek, as in the after-glow
Of former joys she deemed were dark for aye.

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Hope's self to her no trembling bliss can bring!
So breaks the summer's heat a breath from spring!

But now her head is raised with sudden start—
She scans the lessening main with eager eyes,
That yet from its desire doth hold her heart.
He marks her well who worn or listless lies
In front, with head on hand and scar-seamed face,
Nor turns his glance from her a moment's space.

He speaks: 'Good friend! ere yet an hour be past
I trow we gain the town.' He answers 'Ay,'
Who holds the helm; 'yet ere the skiff be fast
To that strange shore, methinks 'twere best a way
Were found to seek this friend, if friend he be,
For nought we know.' 'Nay! little fear have we,'

The maid replies, 'for in the Paynim land
We all are kith and kin. And well he knew
Whose aid we seek, how hard a heathen hand
Doth bind the yoke. Their speech in part to you
Is known; what need we then but forward fare?
For well I think his fame doth fill the air

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'Of Tunis, so you will not ask in vain.
I go with you!' 'Nay! By the saints I swear
That shalt thou not, oh, lady! ere I gain
The needful guard for thee! A tiger's lair
Were safer else! Full little dost thou know
These double-damnèd dogs! Alone I go!

'Peace! honest friend, nor think to baulk my will,
That is not wont to bow nor brook a nay.
I go, and none beside! Should ought of ill
Befal me there, no hand your homeward way
Will hinder.' 'Nay! oh, friend. This risk for me——'
'God keep thee, lady; might it greater be!

''Tis best for all, perchance for him—no more!
Enough! in action's hour let words be few!
Wait but awhile, and well I hope before
The fall of night to find good friends and true.
So half our task were done, for great the power
Of him who props a realm when dangers lower!'

He ceased, and for awhile none spoke again;
Then said the fisher, 'Since it needs must be,

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One warning word I pray you not disdain.
A Frankish knight should they of Tunis see
In Frankish garb, I trow his life were short!
Then hear me now, and ere we win the port

'This cloak I pray thee take. 'Tis worn and old—
The better! See! 'twill hide thy rich attire
From head to foot! 'Tis well! As thou dost hold
Thy life of worth, take heed! Why, now thy sire
Might miss his son! This cap hath made thy face
A fisher's own. Our Lady give thee grace!'

'Ay,' said the maid, 'and keep thy head from harm,
O truest friend that ere a woman's need
Did find! God cheer thy heart and nerve thy arm!'
He spake not back, but bent as if to heed
His homely garb that, as a miser gold,
He grasped, nor slacked awhile that iron hold.

And now they near the shore. Full many a bark
Lies moored about. In this they spread the sail,
Here fill the deck with dire fierce forms and dark;
Horns bray and symbals clash. In that the gale

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Has left a tooth, whose crew now gains the sands,
Some lazy lie, though whole of hull and hands.

And there a galley creeps, with slaves that cower
  Above their toil, and hide the hungry hate
That lights their eyes. Gaunt thralls a tyrant power
  Has bent in frame—in soul a frowning fate.
The maid doth scan them, though her cheek is pale
As death; her quaking limbs are like to fail!

And past they glide, and lay their sail to rest,
  And beat with even oars the drop-dimmed sea
So near the bustling beach; then loud the hest
  Is heard to cease. They lift the blades, as he
Commands who steers the skiff that grating now
Doth graze the shingly sand that meets her prow.

Straight speaks the knight: 'I trow 'tis best we lose
  No time. Farewell till friends I find! Farewell,
Sweet lady! No false friend thy heart did choose.'
  'I thank thee. Ah! the thanks I may not tell
Shall be within my heart.'—'I go!—no more!'
He wildly leaps, and mounts in haste the shore.

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So on, in headlong haste, and pushed by pain,
He hies and gains the town, nor seeks a guide,
As if through haunts of old his course had lain.
Here haps a street to leave the seaward side
Of Tunis toward the land. He makes no stay,
Scarce sees, yet chooses straight that rugged way,

And follows far; then wakes, with throbbing heart,
And looks around. Here come, it seems, but few.
A toiling slave doth play his weary part,
And lag beneath his load. From out the crew
Of some late home-come ship a warrior treads
The path in haste; then pass, with muffled heads,

Some women on their way, and turn once more
To scan the stranger's garb. 'What now were best
To do? A curse upon my lack of lore
In their unhallowed tongue to speak my quest!'
Yet unresolved he turns him round, and sees
An agèd man, who climbs, with weary knees,

The steep ascent, and eyes him hard the while.
A dusky garb he wears, a beard of snow;

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From out his frozen face the dark eyes smile,
Though firm and fast are set the lines below.
And now he fronts the Frank, makes halt, and stays
His limbs upon his staff with mustering gaze,

And saith, in Christian speech, 'Good friend, I crave
Thy grace, an if my words thou deemest bold;
But well I love thy race, so fain would save
Thyself. And trust a man who knows of old
This town; that Frank his course is like to end
But ill who walks therein without a friend.

'Kind Heaven be blessed that led my steps so soon
To help thy need, for else before an hour
Thou mightst have deemèd death the brightest boon
Was left for thee. Not all bereft of power
Am I with those who rule. Fear not, but speak
Thy will, and that thou here alone dost seek.'

'Fair thanks, good sir. Who speaks so passing well
Our tongue abroad, hath heard it sure at home.'
'Ay, many a year! But this were long to tell.
While life is mine, the Frank who here doth roam

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Forlorn, for old love's sake, shall find in me
A friend. Say then what here thy need may be.'

'I fain would find the Frank who late did save
This land in war.' 'The man is next the King
In place and power. In faith, thou now dost crave
No easy boon. Yet I perchance could bring
Thee e'en to this.' 'But ill will brook delay
My charge to him. Lead on, good friend, I pray!'

'Alas! but little recks thy keen desire
How hard the thing it would. What gates of steel
Do guard the great! An gold were ours, through fire
And flood we here might fare.' 'Then mark the seal
Of quick success.' With nimble hand he threw
His mantle back, and clutched the glittering clew

To many a maze, that here should help his need:
The other wondering spake, or feigning well:
'This garb! this wealth! Forgive my little heed
Of thee, good sir. In sooth 'tis passing well!
The man thou seekest, I do hope this night
Thine eyes shall see. But seldom, while the light

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Of heaven shines, may he at ease be found;
And truly much I fear thy steps to guide
By day. Men come; this mantle closer round
Thy form enfold, and on, nor seem aside
To speak with me. I pray thy friendly grace
To make my house till night a resting-place.'

And on they press in deep discourse and low;
The Christian's headlong haste but ill can bear
Delay, and swiftest course had deemed too slow:
The Jew (for such is he), with wordy care,
Paints perils by the score, and, urging still
The suit, with pain doth win at last his will.

'So be it. Yet it likes me ill to leave
A friend so long, who here is strange as I
(In safety true. Yet lightly women grieve.
For whom? Ah, hell! Why leaps my heart so high,
Perchance——) Here spake the Jew; 'Sir Knight,
behold
My house, where at thine ease may all be told.'

They pass within! The place is bravely dight;
Cool couches wait where each his limbs doth lay;

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Thick curtains quench the day for sun-sore sight;
And goodly slaves in rich attire and gay
Do set a meal of dainty meats and wine
That lips will loose were faster locked than thine,

O good Orlando! Full and freely flows
Their talk on things that make the hours employ
For idle tongues; and well the Hebrew knows
Italian ills! They mourn the long annoy
Of northern force and fraud that eats away
The nation's heart, and curse Grandella's day;

For soon his host has marked the stranger's bent!
Then saith he, 'Long I dwelt beside the shore
Of Naples; there by time and toil had hent
What seemed of gold and goods too great a store
For such as I to hold in Christian land!
Who knows my race the rest will understand.

'I hither fled to shun the frown of fate
With that was left, and something here have won.
Yet think not in my heart is aught of hate
Against the Frank! For, sooth to say, with none

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Do I more gladly deal who here have found
Their worth, that thrives, perchance, by change of ground.

'Who knows? Ha, ha! How tastes this flask of wine?
Well. Glad am I; but prithee spare it not!
I bless the hour that brought this board of mine
So good a guest, and pray that so thy lot
May be as is my love! But who be they
Who wait thee here? I think thou thus didst say.'

The other freely spake; no whit did hide
Of that they sought, nor aught Gostanza told
When first she prayed him be her guard and guide.
The Jew gave hungry heed; then, 'Over-bold,
Methinks, thou art,' he said, 'if young and fair
The maid!' 'She lacks not true and kindly care!

'And best I deemed it first to tread alone
This path of peril!' 'Yet I trow but ill
To thee or those good guards this land is known,
Else had ye heard that they, who seek to fill
The mart with goodly slaves have wakeful eyes
To mark, strong hands to clutch so fair a prize!'

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'By all the saints, she shall not lack my aid!
A curse on this mad thought! I straight will seek
The ship once more, and when I leave the maid
May Heaven blight my head!' With blood-brent cheek
And gleaming eye he rose: 'Stay, stay, my son!
An thus thou goest are ye both undone!

'Dost think in such a mood thou aught canst hide
Of that thou art, of that doth fill thy soul?
Yet say, this peril past, thou winnest her side,
What else were won? Will thy one arm control
The might of many, yea, of all who dwell
In Tunis? "Frankish slaves to seize and sell!"

'Needs but this shout to raise a host of foes
Thy perished power were all unmeet to stay;
But trust me, friend! Unmarked no stranger goes
Through these our streets, and on thy course to-day
Full many gave thee heed, perchance less kind
Than mine! An thou dost hie this ship to find

'In headlong haste, no step but dogs a foe.
Whom least thou wouldst thou there mightst chance to bring.

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Wait but till eve; then were it best, I trow,
To lead the maid to him whose sheltering wing
May hide her head from harm. But little fear
Can be in time so short.' 'Yet were I near——'

'Her risk were more; thy power to help were less—
Nay, trust me as I say, it needs must be.
Farewell awhile! for things of weight do press
My every hour. When fall of night makes free
Our covered course, we meet, and all thy will
Is done. Then take thy rest and fear no ill,'

He says, and straight doth pass the inner door.
Hot haste is his through haunts of coolest ease
And wealth untold; nor makes he halt before
A room is won where nought the eye doth please;
'Tis small; a writer's desk and seat are all
It holds; swords, pikes, and knives do clothe the wall.

A slave is here. He speaks: 'Go bar thou fast
The doors where waits the Frank; then send to me
Black Hassan straight.' He goes, and (scarce hath past
A minute's space) a Nubian bends the knee

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Before his lord. 'A prize is ours! yet need
For craft is great. Then give my words good heed!

'This Christian fool hath told me all his heart.
With him is here a maid of peerless form!
If that he saith be true—yea, true in part—
I well do think that they who shun the storm,
With such a prize, will win more weight of gold
Than ten stout captives bring in battle bold.

'Yet well thou knowest what his power hath wrought
Who sways the King. All Franks he fain would free;
And sooth to say, this scheme of ours were naught
For us if known to him, and (cursed be
The evil chance!) in him these hope to find—
Nor vainly hope, I trow—a helper kind.

'Hear now! Take ten armed slaves to-night with thee,
So leave the town to th' east, and gain the side
Of that lone hill that there doth front the sea;
Along the shore beneath 'tis mine to guide
The steps of those we seek. Unarmed are all,
Save this one man. See first ye deftly fall

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'Upon the maid; and, on your lives, no hair
Of hers be hurt! The rest or seize or slay,
But let none go. The captives straight we bear
Where no Frank comes, in hope to hail the day
That frees the town from all this brood of hell—
At worst, in other lands our spoil we sell.

'Fail not ere set of sun to reach the place.
Dost take me?'——'Well! Thy slave thou shalt not chide.'
He goes—a smile upon his swarthy face.
The Jew awhile his hasty steps doth guide
From wall to wall, as treads a beast his den,
Then seeks, nor leaves long time, his scroll and pen.

The captive waits the while in rage and fear,
And thinks all ill, and deems the worst unthought.
Doth curse the bolts that bar his hot career!
Then, worn with fruitless toil, a couch hath sought
Where rest is none, and fires that burn the brain
Goad on the wretch to strive once more in vain.

So pass the hours till eve his host doth bring.
'What means this durance? Speak!' the Christian cries,

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With wrathful mien. 'My son, for good the thing
Was meant; I much did fear thy headlong guise
Of action might undo thy friend and thee.
Is this a wrong? My hoary head shall be

'The forfeit an thou wilt! But go we now
To find the maid! I well have ordered all!'
'Fair thanks and pardon!' Speaks with bended brow
The Frank. While yet the level beams do fall,
They thread the downward streets and gain the shore;
Full soon the bark is found that hither bore

The rovers twain upon their watery way.
With leaps of heart Orlando hails the crew,
'Right welcome thou!' An answering voice doth say,
'Some fear was ours, in sooth.' 'Let words be few,
And make we haste,' the old man murmurs low,
'Or harm, may hap; too well this land I know.'

And now a woman's form hath leapt to land.
'O friend!' she cries, 'my heart was sore for thee!'
With clinging clasp she holds the helper's hand,
And sinks upon the sand with quaking knee

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And lifted face that wakes to joy from pain!
So finds a child his long-lost sire again.

He shrinks, as galled by some death-dealing dart;
A moment veils his face the dusky fold
Of his rough cloak! With quick, unquiet start
He turns him then. 'Nay, be thou blithe and bold,
Dear lady! Straight we seek this man of might,
And all is won! Thy suit he will not slight,

'And power is his to grant the boon with ease!
So this my task were done! Nay, answer not,
But come.' He lifts the maid. She softly frees
His hand and speaks: 'Thy pardon, friend. God wot
I am but weak, a woman full of fears!
Yet lead thou on.' She smiles through unshed tears,

And straight is ready to the leader's hand;
In haste they order all. Beside the sea
The bark is left. 'Fear not! His high command
Is guard enough whom ere an hour ye see,'
So saith the Jew; and now they take their way
Along the shore that skirts the eastern bay.

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Orlando hastes Gostanza's steps to guide.
She smiling speaks: 'I pray thee onward fare
With this good friend. By Carapresa's side
I come. Dost think that women nought can dare,
But still must cumber men? On rock and hill
My foot is firm. With you I fear no ill.'

As seeks a nestling bird his mother's wing,
So she the woman's side, and on they go;
And still to that kind arm she close doth cling,
Though lithe of limb as is the mountain roe.
The fishers follow on the rugged way
As fades the pilèd pyre of parting day.

They pass the town and gain a lonely strand;
Ere long it bends about a bulging hill
That hems the bay, and, as to guard the land,
Stands forth; here rugged rocks, as piled at will
Of some unearthly power upon the shore,
Do stay their course. 'Our steps now bend we more

'Above!' doth speak the Jew, and leads apace
Toward the hill. 'And though ye win with toil

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This upper path, be glad, for now the race
Is run; we near the goal.' A softer soil
They gain at last, where bush and tangled brake
Do clothe the hill. 'Our course we now must take

'Along the wood's low side. The beaten way
Is smooth, and leads to him we fain would find;
So go thou on, fair lady. 'Prithee stay,
Good sir, for much I fear that far behind
The fishers fall. They come? the better! Friend,
The path is here; we near the journey's end.'

So loudly cries the Jew, as swiftly scale
The rock with nimble foot the fishers three;
Then shows the way, and bids them haste, nor fail
To keep the track. 'The rear is best for me,
For faint am I. The forward path is plain.
A moment wait.' The old man speaks again,

And hangs upon his arm as like to fall.
A shriek—a woman's shriek—doth rend the air!
'Unhand me, Hebrew dog! I swear by all
The fiends, from out thy breast this hand shall tear

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Thy heart, if false it be! Wilt stay me? Die!'
He hurls him down the steep, and on doth fly.

But quick a stalwart form hath leapt from out
The upper wood upon the forward way.
His swarthy face, his wild, unearthly shout
By night, do smack of hell! No mortal fray
The Frank doth fear; yet here, with quaking knees,
He halts. That moment's dread the Nubian sees,

And flies upon his throat with lifted knife.
He shuns the stroke, and grasps his fiend-like foe:
They grapple hard; but ere the tiger strife
May find an end, an arm of might doth throw
A veil about his face, and one doth hold
Him fast behind. He falls. The blinding fold

They tighter press; and now a voice doth say,
'The knife is here, good Hassan. Strike but home.'
Another, 'Do but bind, nor think to slay
The Frank. A prize is here. We come! we come!
The man is fast, and safe in hand the maid!'
For now the Jew doth call aloud for aid.

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Then sudden darts the captive down the steep
With all the might that wild despair can know.
He falls! They reel, nor dare a hold to keep.
He wins in headlong course the beach below:
There, bruised and bleeding, yet unconquered still,
He stands, with barèd blade, and fronts the hill;

And time it is, for Hassan comes amain
Adown the rocks, like some fierce hound of hell;
On high the sabre waves he hopes to stain
In Christian blood. His eyes how fierce and fell!
His limbs how mighty in their dusky hue,
That scarce that scanty garb doth veil from view!

They meet, with horrid hate and purpose dire.
The Nubian showers his blows so fast and free,
The weary Frank must curb his keen desire,
And guard himself; so back toward the sea
Is slowly borne, and scarce his bruisèd arm
May longer save his aching head from harm.

Yet like a lion galled and wounded sore
He fights. Each sturdy stroke is parried still.

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The baffled wretch, athirst for gold and gore,
Doth curse aloud the art that baulks his will,
And gnash his teeth, and foam with wolfish spite,
Then hurls his giant bulk upon the knight.

They fall together where a rock doth hide
The flood, and both are plunged at once below.
With joy Orlando's heart doth hail the tide
That whelms his head. A moment more, and so
He steps as on the land, then lifts once more
A dripping head, the black his blade before—

That blade that hungers for its hapless prey,
And swift as light doth pierce his dusky throat.
'Be cursed, thou dog! and cursed this evil day!'
A stream of blood upon the wave doth float—
A gurgling groan is heard, as leaves the breath
His quivering limbs, that straight are fixed in death!

One speaks above: 'Full well that voice I know!'
And while the victor lifts his weary frame
From out the flood, and up the beach doth go,
He hears a joyful shout, then hears his name.

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'Orlando! Dost thou live in very deed?'
And who be these that come with breathless speed—

These twain in Christian garb, who lead the way?
They gain his side, and each hath grasped a hand—
'Oh, chief! oh, friend!' No more their lips can say.
In wonder wild hath brave Orlando scanned
Them both a moment; then, for words too blessed,
Each trusty comrade to his heart hath pressed,

When one doth speak: 'These men we found but now
Right hard beset,' and shows the fishers three,
Who downward come, 'by heathen hounds, and how
Their lives had fared, an none had chanced to be
Upon the shore, in sooth 'twere hard to say.
We passed below, did mark how fierce a fray

'Was waged above, and hastened up the steep.
These three did hold their own, like knights of old;
Five slaves full armed at bay their knives did keep.
They scarce, 'gainst odds like these, though strong and bold
As lions, had prevailed. But ere we drew
Our swords, did turn to fly the dastard crew.

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And straight they told of one whose need was sore,
And led us on to where the clash of steel
Was loud; yet ere we won the under-shore
It ceased. A sounding splash, and loud did peal
Thy curse above the rock. I thought to know
The voice, yet scarce for joy believed, I trow,

'Till we did see thy face. Yet prithee tell
What brought thee here, and all thy haps beside.'
'Nay, nay! No time is this! What fate befel
The lady? Speak, good friends!' 'The night did hide
Her form, my mother's too,' with pain doth speak
The woman's son, 'but haste we both to seek—

'To seek? O hell! And here what hope to find?
Yet stay! The Jew! The Jew yet nigh must be.'
He upward flies, nor lag the rest behind;
They win the path, but there is nought to see—
They pause a moment where the wood grows dark
And thick to tread. Then cries Orlando, 'Hark!

'A sound! On, on! and by your lives be swift!'
And on they press, like wolves to find a prey,

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Though bleeding sore from many a thorny rift
In face and hand, and tear their upward way
To where another track doth mount the hill,
That follow fast, but all is lone and still.

They stay their baffled course, nor further fare.
Some whisper counsels; but Orlando's eyes
Gaze hard around, till loud he speaks, 'What there
Doth lurk?' and leads them straight where darkest lies
The gloom: then sudden rings a shriek around,
And two dark forms adown the brake do bound.

'Think not of them, for here our prize we find!'
Orlando shouts, as, close and crouching low,
He marks the trembling Jew a bush behind.
They seize him straight, and bring, with many a blow
And curse, to where the late-left path doth thread
The wood. His face is pale as are the dead,

And loud he wails, then whines in craven fear.
'Good sirs, if ruth ye show, I lack not gold——'
'Be still, thou dog! and an thy life be dear,
Lead on where lies the maid; and this be told

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Thee straight, If on her head be hurt a hair,
As thou dost live, we strip thee stark and bare,

'And flay thee first, then rend thee limb from limb!
Lead on, I say, or this thy steps shall goad!'
Orlando speaks, and draws, then lays on him
An iron grasp, and down to find the road
That skirts the wood doth go, and drags amain
Through brake and briar the Jew, who yells in vain.

The rest come after; soon the path is won.
He frees the tattered knave, and sets before,
Then speaks—'Thou late didst rest, and now shalt run;
An thou dost linger, know this blade shall gore
Thee hard behind;' and fast on wings of fear
The Jew doth fly, with many a groan and tear.

And on along the path the Frank doth guide,
Then turns, and downward takes a winding way;
So wins by easy steps the ocean's side,
That follows fast; nor dares his course to stay,
Yet turns at times a scared and pallid face
On those behind, who curse his tardy pace.

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At last he turns him to the landward hill
And wins its foot, where nought at first they see
But low and tangled growth, that winds at will
About the bank. Here fast his arm doth free
From blinding bush a dark and narrow cave,
And stoops to enter in, when, 'Hold, thou knave!'

Orlando saith, and grasps with hand of steel
The wretch's arm. 'We need, methinks, some light.
If here the imps of hell do lurk, who steal
Thy prey, thou one shalt call to help our sight
With torch or brand, that sure they do not lack!'
He trembling cries aloud; soon answers back

A voice from out the shade; then light doth gleam
Within; and now toward the mouth doth bear
A form a burning brand. They hail the beam,
And step within, yet sore the slave do scare.
He stands with quaking knees that fain would fly,
But lack the might, to see the foes so nigh.

Orlando then: 'Fear nought, but lead the way
Where lies the Frankish maid. Unharmed shall be

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Thy head if thou each hest of ours obey.
Good friends, I pray you leave the front to me.'
He follows close where leads the moving light
In forward course, nor swerves to left or right.

The rocky roof gives back the flickering glow,
So near at first, the heads of all must bend;
It rises fast and wide, as on they go,
The place doth seem. And now they reach the end,
And near the inner rock that bounds the cave
May mark another torch. A stalwart slave

Doth bear it; yet another nigh doth stand,
And fixes hard with fierce, unwavering eyes,
A woman old, who coys with kindly hand
A drooping head that on her bosom lies;
Upon the rock beside a form is prone,
That like a fawn in fear doth shrink and moan.

The steps draw near! As grasps a drowning wight
A plank amid the storm, her arms do strain
About her friend, and toward the lurid light
She turns a clay-cold face, and parts in vain

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Her lips that give no sound. And now, from out
The dark, 'Ho, are ye safe?' a voice doth shout.

A moment yet she stays as carved in stone,
Then half doth rise, and sinks on bended knee—
'They come indeed! No more we wait alone!'
'O gracious lady, may my thanks to thee
Be known, as was the grief I could not tell.'
She cries, through choking tears, 'Ay, safe and well!'

He lifts her up: 'I bear thee out! Nay, leave
The task to me; the last perchance is mine
In this sweet service. Thee it will not grieve
That I did help thy need, when all is thine
That love can give! The thought shall bless my lot.'
He whispers low, then speaks, 'Here stay we not.

'Slaves, light us on! Friends, see ye follow fast!'
They win the shore. Orlando sets again
His burden down, and saith, 'Tis time at last
To judge the Jew! How think ye, friends? What pain
Would meet his guilt?' 'Death!' answer all as one.
Then speaks Gostanza—'Friends, I pray let none

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But lift a hand against his hoary head!'
Yet fears to look on him she fain would save.
'In sooth such blood as this I scorn to shed!'
Orlando answers. 'Yet full many a slave
May curse our kindness an his life we spare.
What cause hast thou, O wretch, such hate to bear

To all our race?' 'What cause?' doth shriek aloud
The Jew; 'what cause? A child was mine as fair
As this, when in your land: no sire more proud
Or glad than I. Unending torment tear
The men who took her! Oh, that pleading face,
That striving frame! A curse on all your race!

A curse! A curse!' He laughs with horrid glee,
Then shrieks aloud, 'I live your name to hate;
Ye know my heart! Then do your worst on me!
Enough that many a Frank hath found his fate
By me!—by me!' The maid, with one low cry,
Sinks swooning down, and like the dead doth lie.

Orlando speaks: 'Begone!' 'Yet mark me well,'
His friend, 'nor think in Tunis town to stay!

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The night wears on, at dawn our tale we tell
To those are like to bar thine outward way.'
A moment as in doubt the Jew doth stand,
Then flies with tottering haste along the strand.

Their care brings back the maid to life once more,
The woman props her head, that languid lies
With upturned face, as if some vision tore
Her sight away from out the straining eyes.
Orlando then: 'Here truly best it were
To leave a woman's need to woman's care;

'If safe it be to tarry near awhile.'
'Fear not! Our garb will fill all foes with dread
In Tunis and about full many a mile;
And close beneath we much at ease may tread
The nether shore, and tell the things we fain
Would hear of friends long lost and found again!

'We first! That night, when heathen hordes did fall
Upon us scarce awake, they bound us fast
And brought us here, and here perchance were all
In fetters still; but kindly eyes did cast

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That Paynim maid we took upon thy friend
Martino! Soon her prayers and tears did bend

'The chief, to whom her sire and kin were known.
He loosed him straight, and here with praise did bring
For his good care of her, before the throne!
Right sore a conquering foe did press the King
Upon that hour. He heard how skilled and wight
Our friend, and prayed him help the realm in fight.

'He answered fair, yet Franks alone would lead!
In brief at last did free each Christian slave
Who in that sorest strait would help the need
Of Tunis. So a goodly band and brave
Was his! We fought and won! His place is now
Full near the King! The scowling Moors must bow

'To us, the chosen guard! His place and power
Full many a Frank hath blessed! What joy to find
Thee here! Come, seek him straight, nor lose an hour.'
Orlando's tongue a space doth wonder bind,
Then quickly speaks he back, and tells his tale;
They marvelling hear, then say, 'Tis best we sail

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In this your bark to him who dwells beside
The sea. So need we not to pass the town.'
Orlando seeks the maid with measured stride
And drooping head. His melting eyes look down
Upon her pallid face. 'Thy toil is past,'
He saith, 'O lady! Him we find at last.'

Her heart leaps high! She gains with sudden bound
Her feet, yet reels once more! He props her frame.
'And did I hear thee well? And hast thou found
My love? Yet stripes and bonds perchance do maim
His limbs! O men are cruel!' Wildly glow
Her eyes. ''Tis well with him.' He answers low.

'And is he that he once was wont to be?
O cursèd doubts, begone, nor vex my soul!
Forgive, true heart! Yet whose the power to free
The bondsman first? What lot is his? The whole
I fain would hear! Speak, speak, O friend, I pray!'
'He saved the Paynim throne, and yet doth stay!'

'And leaves his land, and those were dear before,
A bondsman all unbound—a slave, though free!

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O heart! by faith like this why set such store?'
The comrade speaks: 'He feared that land to see,
O lady! when the news they hither bore
That there no smile of thine should meet him more.'

Then melts her mood, and quick doth burn again
The maiden blush—that cheek so wan but now.
'For me? O haste we, friend, to ease his pain!'
Her eyes are quenched in tears, and stilled her brow,
So leaning leads she on. They skirt the bay,
And near the place whence first they took their way.

Yet ere they win the bark—'Good friends and true,'
Gostanza speaks, 'of you I ask a grace:
'Tis this! Let nought to him be told by you.
Say but a hapless maid, of Frankish race,
Doth crave his help.' 'Speak but thy will, 'tis done.'
They wondering answer; soon the bark is won.

They leave the cumbered beach, the clambering town,
And cleave a quiet course with whispering oar.
Above, with eerie light, the stars look down,
And all grows dim behind, and all before

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Is wrapped in gloom, as if that veil did hide
A realm of bliss from deserts waste and wide.

Now comes from out a cloud the westering moon,
And on the waves a pearly path doth lay
Before the bark, that seems a kindly boon
Of some bright power within, who points the way,
And shows the goal to those are yet without—
To cheer their hearts, and chide each lingering doubt.

Where leads that kindly beam Gostanza's eyes
Have followed far, and fix the new-lit land.
To cloud her gaze what thoughts and dreams arise!
She weeps, and marks it not, nor lifts a hand
To stay the tender tide that soft and slow
Rolls down her cheek, nor dims its gladdening glow.

They near the shore, pass close an anchored bark,
With lifted oars beneath the shade they steal,
That makes the bowered flood by noonday dark—
A moment's silent gloom, then grates the keel.
They draw the skiff and moor her fast to land,
Then help the maiden's steps with heedful hand.

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They pass the wood, whose darkening depth doth fill
With all her heart would say the bulbul's song,
To myrtle bowers the moonbeams bathe in still
And witching light, that chequering glints along
Their alleys dark, and turns each stock and stone
To ghostly things that haunt a land unknown.

How sweetly comes the breath from lurking flowers,
That sleep like joys long laid at heart to rest,
And wait the wakening ray, the day-spring showers!
And now is well-nigh done their toilsome quest,
For many upward steps are gleaming white
Before; they mount, nor turn to left or right.

One terrace past, another, yet again
Another, still doth mount, and wins at last
The maid, with trembling foot, a garden plain,
That fronts a dwelling, low, and long, and vast.
She veils her closer yet, and grasps the hand
Of Carapresa. All in silence stand!

Men tread in talking groups each flowery way,
Or lie at listless ease, the most around

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A pool where soars aloft a fountain's spray,
Then sinking, soothes the soul with such a sound
As some kind spirit's voice might take to tell
That day and toil are past, and all is well.

And now one nears the pool. That form and face!
Gostanza reels, and closer yet doth cling;
While good Orlando makes toward the place,
With nimble steps doth pass the circling ring,
And fronts the comer, who, with sudden start
And stare falls back, then—'Friend, alive thou art!

He cries, and darts to fold in fast embrace
The lost and found again, and long doth lie
Upon his breast! At last—'What heavenly grace
Hath brought thee back? Methought thou there didst die
Where we were ta'en,' he saith. What things he may
Orlando tells—'Thou seemest, sooth to say.'

He speaketh on, 'Unlike thyself of old;
That hollow cheek, that brow of brooding care
Do tell of sleepless nights!' 'O friend, I hold
The chieftain's charge, and though the load to bear

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Be hard, I love it yet, for this is all
Is left to love! O let me nought recall

'Of that is past. Thou knowest what things employ
Me here. My sword and eke my counsel kept
A kingdom safe, and though such sore annoy
Be with this lot, 'tis great! Who else had wept
His own, a nation's griefs hath ta'en to heart,
And cares of state, have dulled a sorer smart.

'Yet more! Five hundred slaves who else had pined
In hopeless bonds, by help of mine are free:
Full many gone their Christian homes to find;
Some here in arms, who swear by land and sea
To follow still my lead. The King doth pray
And press me hard within this land to stay,

'And this I think to do! Be welcome thou
To all is mine!' 'Yet sure our land doth call
Us home!' 'How serve our land,' with clouded brow
Martino speaks, 'as here? How safe are all
The Franks who come! Yet more! I hope the main
To purge of pirates thus!' 'The hope is vain.

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'Dost think their hate is less who now must hide
That hate awhile, or spent their lust and greed?
Nor are they safe who come! But now, beside
The sea, 'twas ours to help the sorest need
Of some poor Christian maid, who fain alone
With thee would speak, and make her sorrows known.

'Oh keep not longer back her keen desire!'
He loudly speaks, then turns and waves a hand
To her whose limbs are strong, nor aught require,
Save love, to stay them now! At his command
She follows where to th' east a grove doth lie,
Where all is still and safe from ear and eye.

Then speaks the chief: 'I pray thee, lady, tell
How I may help thy need.' 'In bondage lies—
Thy pardon, sir—the man I love too well!'
'In Tunis? Here?' 'O hard, in sooth,' replies
Gostanza, 'hard the grace I hope to find
Wilt leave for me this kingly state behind!

'O hadst thou loved a woman in thy life,
And had I but her tongue my suit to say;

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By all thy vows of old! by that dear strife
Of lovers' tongues, when she would answer "Nay,"
To hear thee swear the more that heart and hand
Were hers till death! O think she here doth stand,

'And knows my quest, and pities all my pain,
And takes thy hand and speaks with tender tears.
'Oh love, if aught within thy heart remain
Of that high hope that yearned in former years,
To win the love was thine by deeds of fame,
Pay here the debt! Those vows at last I claim!

'And wouldst thou heed? And would she win thy heart
By such vain words as these, a power unthought,
A wealth unknown, to leave and take thy part
Of toil once more where all to lose and nought
To gain there were but one fond woman's smile?'
Ere yet her tongue betrays its simple guile,

He cries as one in pain: 'Through flood and fire
I go with thee! Thy suit is won! Yet now
'Tis best we speak of him! Where dost desire
To seek him?' 'Far away, good Lord! But how

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My heart doth fear for him!' 'Nay, blither be;
How well some captives fare thou here may'st see!'

'O should he there forget the land that fed
His wondering infant eyes; the friends who gave
His heart a home; the faith that further led
That heart perchance is now the pampered slave
Of some fell tyrant! Might I rather find
His durance hard so there for home he pined.'

Then hoarsely speaks the chief through bursting tears:
'O lady! what an if no loving heart
Should greet his lone return; if weary years
Await him there, when but the ceaseless smart
Of memory marks each scene of dearest joy?'
'Oh, thus I'll speak to soothe his sore annoy!'

'I heard, O Love, that thou wast laid to sleep
Where all is still beneath the rolling wave;
And dead at heart, I sought the hungry deep!
On, on from land my sail a soft wind drave;
On, on to thee my heart seemed drifting fast,
Till all grew dim, and death itself was past.

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'Methought as in a land I woke again
Was all unknown! And death was past indeed,
For life was mine once more, though pierced with pain.
Once more my hand might help another's need;
My heart might ache for ills besides its own,
Yet sore in grief, in grief no more alone.

'O blessèd morn that broke this peaceful night!
O joy untold! O day for ever dear.
My love doth live, my eyes may hail their light!
So bright a hope did chase the shades of fear,
And but for headlong haste my heart did pray!
Good friends and true did lead me on the way,

'And here am I, and here I find my love!
O leave this cursèd town and come with me,
Where calls thy land, where call the saints above,
'Tis I! 'tis I who bid thy soul be free!'
And quick she lifts her veil and stands confessed;
He reels, as one by blinding beams oppressed.

And then!—O paint we not that moment's bliss!
If one short hour could bid the earth unfold

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Her robe of green, one hour's bright beams could kiss
The flowers of spring from winter waste and cold,
That power were there doth thrill the hearts that beat
Together now, the lips in strife so sweet.

And now they speak together, low and long,
Of all is past—of that is yet to be;
And turn at last to where the wondering throng
Await their coming. Half in fear would she
Fall back from him; but fast his arm is thrown
About her now, nor may she walk alone.

From all the rest Orlando stands apart,
And fronts with pain-pinched brow the star-crowned sea.
They seek him first, and—'O thou truest heart!'
Martino speaks. 'In vain all thanks to thee
Were spoken! Be they till my dying day
Within my breast!' 'And mine,' the maid doth say.

The tones how low and sweet! With lifted hand
He shuns the sound, and turns in haste aside.
Martino next doth thank the fisher band;
Then toward the gathering host her steps doth guide.

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'Let all come hither!' Loud his voice is heard;
Soon all in silence wait their leader's word.

'Good friends,' he speaks, 'one came this night to save
My heart alive, and bring my footsteps home.
This hour I go. Who loves the land that gave
Him birth, and cries forlorn across the foam
To you her sons, who loves his faith and friends,
Come, come! nor serve we here the evil ends

'Of those who fear yet hate the Christian name,
And fain would hold you fast by lust of gold.
Who would be free? Who spurns these bonds of shame?'
'I! I!' an answering shout like thunder rolled,
And fifty men sprang forth and waved on high
Their hands. 'We go with thee to live or die!'

'True hearts, I thank you! Now no moment stay,
But haste to man the ship that lies below.'
They downward speed. 'An hour the homeward way
Must see full well begun. 'Tis best ye go,
Good fisher-friends, with us. To bring you where
You dwelt of old shall be our after care;

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'And trust us both to bear your worth in mind.
And thou, O best of friends——' 'I go to seek
My life of old! All bliss O may ye find!
'Tis spoken now, but spare my tongue! 'Tis weak
And fond. Lead on! I follow.' Straight they fare,
With hasty steps, adown the moonlit stair.

The level sun, from out his fleecy fire
Of cloud, in robes of light has clothed the sea,
Where one lone ship toward the Eastern pyre
Has spread her sail. I pray you mark the three
Who hold the deck; that knight who bends him now
Above the wave, with pale and scar-seamed brow,

And they who front the light with longing eyes,
Then turn anew to mark each well-loved face,
And read by light of day the tale that lies
Engraven there; that tale your kindly grace
Has followed far. Farewell! My task is done!
They pass away toward the rising sun.

THE END.

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NOTES TO THE LADY OF LIPARI.

NOTE A.

'The northern lord
Who came to save a shepherd from his sheep.'

Charles of Valois was invited into Italy by Pope Boniface the Eighth to assist him against the Bianchi or moderate Guelfs. In 1301 he was admitted into Florence, and committed great cruelties upon the Bianchi. Dante, among others, was exiled.

NOTE B.

'the foe
Of Florence.'

In 1325 Castruccio Castracani, with Galeazzo Visconti, defeated the Florentines and ravaged the neighbourhood of the city, which sent for help to Robert of Naples.

NOTE C.

'And in the distance loomed the baleful star
Of tyrant power.'

In 1342 the Florentines conferred the lordship of their city upon Walter of Brienne, titular Duke of Athens, who proved a violent and sanguinary despot. I am aware that in the poem this event is placed apparently too early, but this inaccuracy will, I think, be excused.

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